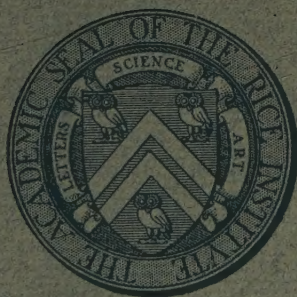


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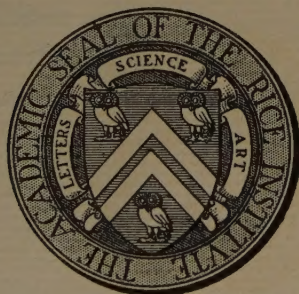
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SHAKESPEARE: THINKER, SHOWMAN, AND ARTIST¹

I

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

HIS name was Will, as he himself announced with wearisome punning in Sonnets 135 and 136, and he is the Will-o'-the-Wisp of poets, forever alluring us, forever eluding us. The commercial playwright, the inspired artist, the thinker—they are all in his writings, but when you try to put your finger on his personality, he, like the Irishman's flea, isn't there. Edwin Arlington Robinson sensed this elusiveness of Shakespeare in his fine poem "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford":

He treads along through Time's old wilderness
As if the tramp of all the centuries
Had left no roads.

There are a number of authenticated facts about his external existence, there are many legends in varying degrees of credibility, and there is abundant evidence in his writings of his mental operations, but when we seek him in his habit as he lived we are reminded of what Keats said about the Grecian Urn:

Thou silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity.

¹A series of lectures delivered at the Rice Institute in the spring of 1929 by Stockton Axson, Litt.D., L.H.D., LL.D., Professor of English Literature at the Rice Institute.

Of course, Matthew Arnold said much the same thing in his sonnet on Shakespeare, but the purpose of this writing is contrary to the spirit of Arnold's sonnet which was the spirit of nineteenth century romantic Shakespearean criticism. It is the purpose of this writing to be as realistic as is warranted, as common-sense as the phenomena and the deductions therefrom will permit; and yet clearly recognizing the objective character of his writing, perhaps the most objective in the range of English literature, it is still true that there is something there which tempts almost every writer to speculate about the individual, the personality behind the book, the man Shakespeare.

The commentator may assume, like Benedetto Croce, the purely æsthetic attitude, or he may adopt the cool, historical method, like Stoll and Schücking, yet all, or nearly all, are betrayed into attempts to glimpse the man Shakespeare between the lines of his poetry. These three and many other moderns are emphatic in their reactions against the subjective critics who would interpret dramatic lines as personal utterances, and yet nearly all hazard occasional opinions about the man who wrote the dramas and poems.

Says Croce: "It is now time to recognize with resignation and clearly to declare that it is not possible to write a biography of Shakespeare."¹ Croce is as opposed to the historical and philological approach as to the subjective. He says in effect: here is the poetry (it is generally of poetry rather than of drama that Croce speaks), very great poetry to be understood and relished as such; nothing about the man who wrote it can be known with certitude, and if we did know anything about him it would have nothing to do with the æsthetic value of the poetry. Accept the poetry, says

¹*Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, by Benedetto Croce, translated by Douglas Ainslie, Henry Holt & Company, 1920, p. 122.

Croce, and let the elusive man who wrote it rest in obscurity.

Yet Croce is occasionally inveigled into saying something about the man Shakespeare. Echoing a remark of Goethe's, he writes: "He [Shakespeare] must indeed have been healthy and strong and free, when he created something so free, so healthy, and so strong as his poetry."¹

To know that a man was "healthy and strong and free" is to know a good deal about a man. With all his skepticism about biography, with all his impatience with those who would track the authentic steps of Shakespeare the man through the mazes of his poetry, even Croce must needs at times speculate a little about the man behind the artist.

E. E. Stoll, at the other end of the corridor from Croce, protagonist of the historical method, is in agreement on one point with Croce, the futility of trying to identify the lines in the plays with the personal thought and predilections of the man who wrote the plays. In contemporary Shakespearean criticism Professor Stoll is perhaps the most "external"—to use a word which he reiterates.

He is ruthless in his exposure of the romantic critics' fallacies, of attempts to read modern psychology into Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, and he is unsparing in his criticisms of those who seek the man Shakespeare in the writings of Shakespeare; "Othello's morals are stage morals"² is a characteristic utterance—meaning, not to be explained on human, realistic, psychological principles, but by a playwright's purpose to get a theatrical effect, suited to the unrealistic, unexact tastes of Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences—a playwright working by the accepted methods of his age and of his stage.

¹op. cit., p. 136.

²*Othello: An Historical and Comparative Study*, by E. E. Stoll, *University of Minnesota Studies in Language and Literature*, March, 1915, p. 14.

Yet with all his acumen and clarity, Professor Stoll is betrayed into a good many self-contradictions, some of which are due to the fact that William Shakespeare, individual, will insist occasionally on intruding upon Professor Stoll's objective interpretation of the plays despite Doctor Stoll's resolution to keep him out.

Let one example suffice for illustration. On page 13 of *Shakespeare Studies*¹ occurs the statement: "Even what may seem to be his aversions are not personal, but wholly traditional and inherited:—his aversion to Jews if he had any; his disgust for the sweaty, ill-smelling mob, frequently given expression, which belonged to many of the writers of his time; his patriotic contempt for the French. He was prejudiced only as England was prejudiced, or the ruling classes of England."

In that mere statement there are suggestions of an individual (we are coming back to the contradiction presently). According to the statement Shakespeare was "patriotic," and he shared the prejudices of "the ruling classes of England." If we know that a man is patriotic and that his prejudices are patrician rather than democratic, we know a little about the man.

Perhaps Sidney Lee contrives to hold the objective attitude as consistently as any Shakespearean scholar. Commenting on the much-discussed question whether or not we can learn anything of Shakespeare's own political predilections from his dramatic attitude toward the crowd, Lee warns us against accepting an "artistic and purely objective ambition" to create "dramatic plausibility" as evidence of the author's "personal malice" or "political design."²

¹ In the noble essay entitled "On the Anniversary of the Folio."

²*A Life of William Shakespeare*, by Sir Sidney Lee, New Edition, Rewritten and Enlarged, Macmillan, 1916, p. 413. Lee, Stoll and many other

Yet even Lee speaks of "Shakespeare's detached but inveterate sense of justice;"¹ this point must not be pressed too hard, for Lee is thinking of Shakespeare as artist rather than man when he makes this statement; but there would seem to be some relationship between a "detached" artist with an "inveterate sense of justice" and a man himself with a similar habit of mind. Mr. John Galsworthy, for instance, reveals precisely these traits in his plays, in his novels and in his critical and expository writing, and, it is said, in his personal bearing on the lecture platform.² In other words Mr. Galsworthy's habits of mind and personal bearing appear in his work as a dramatic artist, and it is surely no extravagant metaphysical fancy to infer that there may have been in Shakespeare a similar relationship between the artist-dramatist and the man.

To remove to more solid ground: Doctor Stoll involves himself in a contradiction when the passage just quoted from him is compared with his essay "Shylock" in the same volume, *Shakespeare Studies*: "His aversion to Jews *if he had any*" is a clause in the essay "On the Anniversary of the Folio;" but much of the learned and interesting essay on "Shylock" is an argument that Shakespeare had emphatic prejudices against Jews, the prejudices of his contemporary fellow-countrymen, the argument summed up in a question:³ "Why should we refuse to recognize it [racial and social prejudice against Jews] in Shakespeare, who, *more than any*

modern commentators call attention to the fact that such expressions as "strong breaths" and "greasy caps" were conventional phrases in Elizabethan-Jacobean drama.

¹*Life*, p. 414.

²See *Conversations on Contemporary Drama*, by Clayton Hamilton, Macmillan, 1924.

³*Shakespeare Studies: Historical and Comparative in Method*, by Elmer Edgar Stoll, Macmillan, 1927, p. 280.

other poet, reflected the settled prejudices and passions of his race?"

Prejudices "if he had any;" he "more than any other poet reflected the settled prejudices and passions of his race."

This is only one of several contradictions in Doctor Stoll's peptic pages. Attention is called to this contradiction not for perverse joy in catching Doctor Stoll in bad logic, but rather in proof that if one is absorbingly interested in Shakespeare as poet or dramatist it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid some sort of notion, however wavering in outline, of the sort of man William Shakespeare himself was.

Croce is right in calling attention to the triviality and unilluminating quality of most of the biographical facts which are laboriously repeated in one book after another. Stoll is right in rejecting the subjective portraiture of Shakespeare the man which make him what the disposition of the writer leads him to think Shakespeare was—was it Samuel Butler who said that every portrait is a picture of the artist himself?

Doctor Edward Dowden sentimentalized Shakespeare too much,¹ even as he sentimentalized Shelley too much. Doctor Dowden was a great gentleman and an accomplished scholar, and we at least who belong to the "mauve decade" are ungrateful if we forget what he did to inspire us with enthusiasm for Shakespeare. He led our judgments wrong in many ways, but he stimulated in us an affection for Shakespeare's writings without which our lives would have been poorer. He may have done as much as any of the eulogists to ignite the counterblasts of Tolstoy and Shaw, but he knew much more about Shakespeare than the attackers ever knew or ever could know. His Irish heart, however, sometimes led

¹Especially in *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art*, by Edward Dowden, Harper & Bros., 1881.

his scholar's head into fantasies and imaginings which cannot stand the hard, dry light of modern realistic criticism.

Less dependable than Dowden are Georg Brandes¹ and Frank Harris,² first because their Shakespearean scholarship is inferior to Dowden's, and secondly because of their reckless "journallese." Brandes is as certain that Cleopatra is the poet's image of a lady whom Shakespeare actually knew and trafficked with as if Shakespeare had come back from spirit land and told Brandes the secret.³ It would be comfortable to know anything as confidently as Brandes knew everything when he was alive and writing books. His *William Shakespeare* should be catalogued under the head of fiction. Yet Brandes wrote a book which deserves to live because of its gusto and its perception of Shakespeare the poet from the point of view of a cosmopolitan scholar and lover of great literature. It is as unsafe as the writings of Taine, his "predecessor and master" (to quote Herford⁴) and as interesting reading, which is to say much. But it is not a book for first readers of Shakespeare because they will close the volume thinking they know a great deal more about Shakespeare the man than is knowable.

Frank Harris's *The Man Shakespeare* is as sprightly reading as the book by Brandes, and even less reliable. His deductions of the man from his writings are more detailed than those of Brandes and less plausible because more erotic. Whatever Shakespeare was, the attentive reader of Shakespeare's own words cannot believe that he was the passion-

¹*William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*, by Georg Brandes, Macmillan, 1914.

²*The Man Shakespeare*, by Frank Harris, Mitchell Kennerly, 1909.

³This is of course a widespread assumption shared by many commentators including even so careful a writer as Schücking: See *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, by Levin L. Schücking, Henry Holt, 1922, p. 138.

⁴*A Sketch of Recent Shakespearean Investigation*, by C. H. Herford, Blackie & Son, 1924.

wasted, timid creature portrayed by Harris. Some of the sonnets might have been written by the man Harris imagines, but *Henry the Fifth* and *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* and *Cymbeline* could not have been written by such a man. If we must make choice between this sex-obsessed epicene and the Goethe-Croce conception of a man "healthy and strong and free" we must accept the latter conception, not merely because it is pleasanter to accept it, but because the conception better accords with the facts of the things Shakespeare wrote.

There is one fact seldom if ever noted by the commentators, the freedom from lubricity of the last plays Shakespeare wrote, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare found that his Elizabethan style of drama had grown old-fashioned in the Jacobean age when literature was becoming fashionable (that is the worst thing that can happen to literature—when fashion takes up literature, literature is preparing its *nunc dimittis*). Fine ladies and gentlemen of King James's court began to patronize the drama and young John Fletcher and his young nobleman friend, Francis Beaumont, belonging to the new era, knew how to hit the taste of these sybarites. Nothing too solid or serious, something pretty and fanciful and artificial. The young men were writing for the Globe Theatre Company, Shakespeare's company, and Shakespeare, always impressionable to prevalent styles of writing, must, now that he is no longer young, adapt himself to the new style if he is going to continue writing and he is not quite ready to cease writing altogether (the writing-itch is a lingering disease, well-nigh chronic), so he dresses himself in new garments, lays aside the relentless tragedy of *Lear*, the inescapable tragedy of *Macbeth*, the austere tragedy of *Coriolanus* (written just a year or so before) and takes lessons from the

youngsters¹ in tacking happy endings on to tales of sorrow, letting fancy run riot through not only improbabilities but grotesque impossibilities, and, just because he happened to be Shakespeare he outdid the youngsters on their chosen ground.

But he differed from the youngsters in two particulars. Some of the people (not all) were as substantial and lifelike as those he put into his tragedies. There was still something of what George Saintsbury has called Shakespeare's inability to "scamp" his character creation in his period of tragedy writing, and so some of his leading people in the latter plays are real people in new-fangled tenuous plots. There is a fibre in some of the leading characters in the latter plays which is lacking in Beaumont and Fletcher's fragile creations.

The other respect in which he differs from his young friends is his refusal to tickle the prurient fancies of the polite ladies and gentlemen who sniggered over the sly innuendoes and graceful risqué allusions of Beaumont and Fletcher.

The young Shakespeare had been susceptible to literary fashions of the fine gentlemen, whom probably he emulated, who wrote erotic verse, and so the young Shakespeare wrote *Venus and Adonis* and the sonnets (some of which are decidedly of the court of the little god Eros). The earlier comedies are, in passages, of a piece with this erotic non-dramatic poetry, but as Shakespeare grew to early maturity he wrote less that was risqué and more that was frankly obscene.

¹On relationship of Shakespeare's last plays to the drama of Beaumont and Fletcher, see *The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare*, by A. H. Thorndike, Press of O. B. Wood, Worcester, Mass., 1901; also see *A Life of William Shakespeare*, by Joseph Quincy Adams, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925, chap. 22.

The maturer Shakespeare, in the manner of his play-writing contemporaries, often used language which delighted the popular audience (chiefly male) at the public theatres. When Falstaff and Prince Hal fell to slanging each other they used the language with which the masculine audience was familiar in street and tavern, merely used it more copiously than most of those in the audience could, for it requires imagination even to be richly obscene.

William Shakespeare was not squeamish. He was a man in a world of men and he used man's talk when he could make his audience guffaw by using it.

More than that, he could and did use obscenity freely when it fitted the character and the situation, as when Mercutio and the Nurse meet each other in *Romeo and Juliet*, as when Cleopatra's maiden (female if not maiden) attendants talk with Alexas and the soothsayer in an antechamber of the palace, talk about the things with which minds are likely to be occupied in a court dedicated to "love" but not to constancy. But sly and prurient and inquisitively veiled the talk is not. It is as frank as it is indecent—indecent by the standard of much literature of today, which literature is more in the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher's *double entendre* than in the manner of Shakespeare's robust virility.

But, and this is the point, the last plays were interestingly devoid of improper speech, either in his old resonant manner or in the innuendo of Beaumont and Fletcher. Many Shakespearean plays call for expurgation before they can be used in modern classrooms, especially now that education is co-education. But little expurgation is necessary in the last plays—almost none. When lasciviousness became fashionable Shakespeare dropped it. What the servant in *Winter's*

*Tale*¹ says about the ballads of Autolycus applies to Shakespeare's language, "so without bawdry, which is strange."

He gave the gorgeously costumed courtiers the sort of plots they craved, he eliminated severe talk about politics which the sturdy popular audiences of earlier days had accepted in his English historical plays, he spared the brittle brains of his fashionable auditors the philosophy of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, he respected their tender sensibilities which shrank from tragic endings, he centered his story in love, the one thing in which they were interested, but it should not be morbid love as in so much of Beaumont and Fletcher—it should be the love of Imogen, whom Sidney Lee calls, and perhaps with justification, "the crown and flower of his [Shakespeare's] conception of tender and artless womanhood,"² or the constant love of insulted Hermione, or the idyllic love of Perdita and Miranda. And he gave these society ladies and gentlemen no sly equivocations over which they could wink at each other with sophisticated eyelids.

His poetic genius has not slackened; if his dramatic structure is looser-fibred that is because of the nature of the plays he is writing; only his mirth is less; and one guesses that this is because his robust nature does not favor the sort of mirth prevalent among these shallow auditors who laughed not from their lungs but from the corners of their sensual lips.

Schücking³ calls attention to a corresponding purity of speech in the early *Midsummer Night's Dream*, "written for a wedding in the house of some great personage"; "No

¹Act IV, sc. 4, line 194. The references are to the third edition (1910) of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by William Allan Neilson, Houghton Mifflin Co.

²*Life*, p. 422.

³*Character Problems*, p. 18.

coarse word is uttered"; "Every suspicion of a lascivious thought is avoided." But Beaumont and Fletcher introduced lascivious thoughts and pregnant expressions into their plays intended for production at court. The point is not nullified by the case of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. No doubt Shakespeare had tact and suited the language of *Midsummer Night's Dream* to what he supposed to be the taste of his aristocratic audience, but it is clear that in his latter plays he refrained from impurities for some other reason, because the audiences before which his plays were produced were the same that took pleasure in Beaumont and Fletcher's innuendoes.

In short the Shakespearean conception of womanhood and true love remained untarnished in his latter plays, and his language grew pure precisely when the audience had come to expect the speech that is called "suggestive."¹

Surely, there was something sound and clean in this William Shakespeare.

Whatever experiences he may have had in youth, or in young manhood when he left his wife in Stratford to seek his fortunes in London—and it is quite likely that he had experiences which he would have been better off without—whether or not the sonnets tell us anything authentic about those experiences (and an equally good case can be made

¹The flaw in the present argument is that many of the earlier plays were acted "on command" at the court of Elizabeth. Whether these court performances toned down the obscenity, we do not know. But Elizabeth was coarser in speech than James (see Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex*). It was at the court of James that there began those tendencies which culminated in the "politer" age of the Restoration, the refinements of vice in which John Dryden first rejoiced and which he subsequently condemned—"this lubric and adultr'ate age" ("*Ode to memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew*"). The main point is unaltered, that Shakespeare's last plays, molded in the new fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher, contain no titillations of polite but prurient imaginations.

for the sonnets as "confessional" or "conventional" with little or no personal experience behind them) there was, it would seem, in this man Shakespeare something healthy and incorruptible.

To the testimony of the last plays, when Shakespeare had plenty of incentive to make them rotten but preferred to make them pure, add the testimony of the vigorous historical plays of earlier days and the stern tragedies which he wrote in between the historical plays and the tragi-comedies, and it becomes impossible to accept the Frank Harris portraiture of the man Shakespeare: a portrait of a Swinburne (to whom Harris explicitly likens Shakespeare) consumed with passion, or an Ernest Dowson (about whom Mr. Harris has written understandingly and sympathetically) wrecked by passion—but not a portrait of William Shakespeare.

Mr. Stoll does well to reject such attempts as those of Brandes and Harris to deduce from Shakespeare's copious dramatic utterances the details of Shakespeare's personal career.

Nevertheless it is impossible to avoid altogether Shakespeare the man when reading carefully and repeatedly the writings of Shakespeare the playwright, the artist, and the thinker.

Even so disciplined a scholar as President Neilson (he who makes a new text of all Shakespeare's writings has undergone about as severe scholastic discipline as is possible), even Neilson cannot refrain from parentheses which indicate that he thinks that some things in the plays represent what Shakespeare himself thought and believed or disbelieved and rejected, as for instance when Neilson writes of *Coriolanus*: "Nowhere does Shakespeare rise more triumphantly above what we may suppose to have been his own

personal prejudices, to show the workings of the permanent laws that govern the relations of men in society."¹

Doctor Neilson in collaboration with Doctor A. H. Thorndike compiled the indispensable manual, *Facts About Shakespeare*, in which, concerning this same tremendous *Coriolanus*, there occurs the sentence, "Whatever else he may have written in these years here is surely the period of tragedy"²—meaning, it is clear from the context, not that Shakespeare wrote his personal experiences into his tragedies, but that in the tragedies there must be some suggestion of the way Shakespeare himself regarded human fatality.

In the whole vexed question whether or not there are authentic tracings of the man in the things he wrote there is one distinct line of demarcation, that between the incidents of Shakespeare's life and the things which he personally thought and believed.

It is a wild goose chase to seek autobiography in Shakespeare's writings, but there is surely in these writings some autopsychography (to employ Mr. Gamaliel Bradford's word).

From the sonnets we can learn nothing indisputable about the occurrences of Shakespeare's life because they tell either too little or too much.

We can learn nothing from Shakespeare's writings about his relationship with his wife. A dramatic warning put in the mouth of a fictitious character, Prospero³—against pre-nuptial sexual intimacy is surely inadequate as corroborative evidence of a meager external biographical and biological indication that William's and Anne's first child was born

¹*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by William Allan Neilson, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906, p. 1097.

²*The Facts About Shakespeare* by William Allan Neilson and Ashley Horace Thorndike, Macmillan, 1913, p. 82.

³*The Tempest*, Act IV, sc. 1, lines 14-23.

too soon after their marriage to have been begotten and conceived in wedlock.

That he was unhappy with Anne is as unprovable from his writings as that he was happy with her. From external records it is apparent that he was able to endure long periods of absence from her with fortitude. But from the same external evidence it seems clear that when his busy career in London was ended he settled down with her sensibly in Stratford and ended his days in domestic quietude—whether in domestic bliss, who can say?

There must be no yielding here to temptation to discuss the interlineation in Shakespeare's will by which he bequeathed "unto my wife my second best bed with the furniture" (the only mention of his wife in his will), for many long discussions have "proven" by this famous line many things varying from studied insult to exceptional conjugal tenderness.

Careful biographers, like Sidney Lee¹ and J. Q. Adams² mention without comment the tradition handed down by John Dowdall on the strength of what he said the parish clerk told him when he visited Stratford in 1693 (seventy-seven years after Shakespeare's death and seventy years after the death of Mrs. Shakespeare) that the widow "did earnestly desire to be laid in the same tomb with him," but that the request was declined because the sextons shrank from the curse pronounced in Shakespeare's epitaph upon anyone who "moves my bones."³

If the legend is true it indicates in Mrs. Shakespeare a pathetic devotion to her dead spouse. But legends are treacherous, and all we really know is that Mrs. Shake-

¹*Life*, p. 487.

²*Life*, p. 476.

³Dowdall said the parish clerk told him that the epitaph was written by Shakespeare "himself before his death."

speare's body was entombed in the chancel next to her husband's grave, with a better inscription on the tomb than the master poet wrote for himself, an inscription presumably composed by the educated son-in-law, Doctor Hall, in behalf of his wife, his sister-in-law, her husband and himself, an inscription which gives as Sidney Lee says, "poignant expression to filial grief."¹

If one is bent on evidence that Shakespeare's marriage was not unhappy he may find it best in the incomparable creations of winsome and noble women made by the poet during a period of twenty years of dramatic writing. Whatever the truth about the marriage, certainly Shakespeare was never "sourèd on women." And that's that.

In many of the plays there are expressions of paternal tenderness which only a great poet and, one fancies, only a fond father could have written, but if Shakespeare ever wrote anything expressive of his personal grief over the death of his only son it has been lost. From the public he veiled his sorrows in the uproarious mirth of *Taming of the Shrew* and Sir John Falstaff, creations coincident with and just after the death of his little boy. It is a safe guess that this implies not callousness on the part of the father, to whom contemporaries applied the adjective, "gentle," but rather the repeated story of actors and all public entertainers, the story (with modification) of Pagliacci, the necessity, as they say in modern stage parlance, that "The curtain must go up," no matter if the actor's heart is breaking. These lines are written a few days after the publication of a news dispatch concerning a young acrobat who wondered why his father, senior member of the "team," did not join him on the stage, somersaulted toward the wings, heard from the ashen faced "props" that his father had just died of heart failure,

¹ *Life*, p. 504.

gyrated back to stage center, completed his act alone, took his curtain call bowing and smiling and then retiring behind the scenes sobbed his young grief out on the still bosom of his father.

Like the provident business man he was, Shakespeare drew his will carefully to safeguard his daughters and their heirs, but he omitted adjectives of endearment when naming his daughters. Some testators employ affectionate terms in these semi-public documents. Apparently that was not William Shakespeare's way.

And so we might catalogue the things domestic about which we should like Shakespeare's own words and find—nothing.

Stoll says: "Only once, for a moment, does Shakespeare grow personal (for he remarks upon the little eyases, rivals to his company, in *Hamlet*, have to do with a Company affair), when, remembering his poaching days, perhaps, he gives Justice Shallow a 'dozen white luces on his old coat,' in allusion (with the boyish prank of a pun on his enemy's name intended) to the coat of arms of Sir Thomas Lucy, who had prosecuted him. The old legend may, then, be true, we are delighted to discover."¹

Even here Stoll writes with "subintents and saving clauses"—"perhaps" and the legend "may be true." The story of the poaching and the punishment is at best doubtful and though Sidney Lee, little given to credulity, accepts the story as a fact and accepts the reference to Justice Shallow² as a lampoon on Sir Thomas Lucy, on the other hand J. Q. Adams rejects the story, founded on a late tradition, first uttered by Archdeacon Davies who had been vicar of Sapperton, and incorporated by Rowe in the first sketch of

¹*Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 13-14.

²*Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act I, sc. 1.

Shakespeare's life of sufficient proportions to be called a biography, and Professor Adams reasons well. It is a checkmate, this endeavor to prove or disprove autobiographical matter in the description of Justice Shallow's coat-of-arms.

Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton, one of the most recent writers who refers to the Lucy-Shallow business inclines to Sidney Lee's view of identification. The lines may well indicate an allusion to Lucy but they prove nothing about Shakespeare's personal contacts with or animus against Lucy. Shakespeare found repeated sources of merriment in the blundering stupidity of minor minions of the law (compare Dull in *Love's Labor's Lost* and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*) and it is possible that he had Sir Thomas Lucy in mind when he created the absurdities of Justice Shallow, but a creative writer's reminiscences may color a character, or caricature, without being a portrait of the flesh-and-blood original— and certainly may be without personal animosity.

In seeking unquestionable allusions in Shakespeare's writing to things personal to himself we are practically reduced to the reference in *Hamlet* to the popularity of the children actors. Though this is, as Doctor Stoll says, "a company affair," yet Shakespeare is penning lines here which reflect his own resentment against the prestige of the child players, whose vogue was hurting business at the Globe Theatre— his own business, and, after all, a provident business man's calamitous business experience is a personal experience.

Beyond that it is impossible to say for certain that any of Shakespeare's lines refer to personal experiences. We may guess much. We can prove little.

Books on Shakespeare, like those by Walter Raleigh¹

¹*Shakespeare*, by Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh, English Men of Letters series, Macmillan, 1913.

and John Masefield¹ are interesting reading, often plausible, seldom if ever wildly hypothetical like the books written by Brandes and Harris. But they are not proof. Raleigh wrote with the acumen of a trained man of letters, Masefield with the perceptions of a poet—both illuminating the art and humanity of Shakespeare, but neither establishing anything absolute about the man in his writings. Practically the same thing may be said about F. S. Boas,² an illuminating critic but not a biographical interpreter.

One of the sanest recent books on Shakespeare has been referred to a few lines back, the book by Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton.³ The author, former solicitor-general of Ireland, a Justice of the High Court of Ireland, Member of Parliament, and an expert in English jurisprudence, knows his law and his Shakespeare equally well and he seems to the layman to dispose once and for all of the assumption that Shakespeare had any systematic legal training or was more conversant with the law than many of his contemporaries: "The easy use which Shakespeare made of legal topics has caused some of his commentators to jump to the conclusion that, at some stage of his career, he had been a lawyer or a lawyer's clerk. This theory is not supported by any extrinsic evidence or by any tradition; and there does not appear to be any necessity for resorting to it. Most of Shakespeare's legalisms were drawn either from the history of the Plantagenet and Tudor periods, from the procedure of Courts of Justice, from the jargon of the Law of Real Property,

¹*Shakespeare*, by John Masefield, Home University Library, Williams and Norgate.

²Boas' classic is *Shakespeare and his Predecessors*, Scribner's, 1905; he has more recently published a useful handbook in which, by the way, he adopts the conventional spelling of the poet's name: *An Introduction to the Reading of Shakespeare*, Oxford University Press, 1927.

³*Links Between Shakespeare and the Law* by Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton, with a Foreword by The Hon. James M. Beck, former solicitor-general of the United States, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929.

or from certain notorious aspects of the Criminal and Constitutional Law of this time. These were subjects which had many avenues of approach to his mind. In the Elizabethan age, writes Mr. Hubert Hall, of the Public Record Office, in an oft-quoted passage, 'every man was up to a certain point his own lawyer,' and 'was well versed in all the technical forms and procedure.' The public took a keener interest in legal proceedings than they do in our time. There were fewer places of recreation, and people with idle time on their hands were more disposed to haunt the Courts for the purpose of whiling it away."¹

In the Southern States forty years ago there was an exact analogy to the situation which the author describes in Elizabethan England, comparatively few sources of amusement and therefore a keen interest in legal proceedings among people who crowded the court rooms.

On page 9 Sir Dunbar refers to the well-known fact that both William Shakespeare and his father, John, were frequently engaged in litigation—John "in more than fifty law-suits in the course of forty years." It would have been strange if a man of Shakespeare's keen intelligence had not picked up a deal of legal lore in such circumstances, but Sir Dunbar in pages 10–12 shows that Jonson used legal phraseology with more technical accuracy than Shakespeare and that references to the law by Peele and Nashe were "more pungent and precise than any of the kind in Shakespeare," and yet as Sir Dunbar says, "nobody suggests that Peele and Nashe were lawyers." And finally Sir Dunbar shows in detail Shakespeare's association with the Inns of Court. In short, Shakespeare was not a lawyer at any time but had abundant opportunity of becoming acquainted with legal forms and phraseology.

¹ *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

In the foreword to the book the Hon. James M. Beck refers to Lord Chief Justice Campbell who in 1859 published his famous book *Shakespeare's Legal Requirements*. The testimony of so eminent a jurist led many of us of the laity to suppose that Shakespeare's knowledge of the law was phenomenal even though our common sense told us that we could not accept Lord Chief Justice Campbell's conclusion that Shakespeare had ever been a practicing lawyer. Mr. Beck says: "The Lord Chief Justice, with an unusual disregard of the value of testimony, delivered the sententious judgment that only a lawyer could possibly have written the plays."

Here it may be said that there has been much confusion between "learning" and "information" in writing about Shakespeare. He was neither ignorant nor learned. Most recent commentators accept the statement of William Beeson who lived in the Restoration Age and who reported on the authority of his father, one of Shakespeare's fellow-actors, that before going to London Shakespeare taught school for a time. Certainly his early plays are redolent of Latin, and he wrote French (in *Henry the Fifth*) with fluency if not with idiomatic precision. He was keenly interested in English and Roman history, particularly as he got it from Holinshed and Plutarch. He seems to have been a reading man in the intervals of his busy activities—especially interested in books of travel. He had not Ben Jonson's scope and precision of learning and therefore Ben talked about Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek." In estimating the statement we must consider the source. A Harvard professor of classics might and probably would say the same thing about the classical attainments of a teacher in a preparatory school even though the teacher could read Caesar's *Commentaries* and Xenophon's *Anabasis*.

Shakespeare had a quick, inquisitive and acquisitive mind, was interested in many things, apparently in everything, took what he needed, disregarded what he did not need. One might say that he had the habit of mind of a superior, a very superior journalist. It is certain that he was not a lawyer. It is almost certain that he was at one time a school teacher. It is certain that he was not erudite. It is certain that he had a large store of information and the perceptions and intuitions of a man of genius.

Doctor A. C. Bradley in his lecture-essay *Shakespeare the Man*¹ is less happy and successful than in his previous lectures on *Shakespearean Tragedy*,² because as a human being he would like to say something human about the man but as a scholar he is thwarted by the dubiety of the evidence. The lecture was originally delivered after the articles by Frank Harris had appeared in the *Saturday Review* but before they had been collected in book form,³ and, while Bradley "cannot share . . . a good many of Mr. Harris's views," he gives the impression that he would like to be as confident as Mr. Harris that Shakespeare is in his writings. But the habits of a scholar forbid, and one closes the book with no clear idea as to how Shakespeare the man appeared to Doctor Bradley. It is a hesitating essay, like a boy putting his foot into cold water, drawing a deep breath to get resolution for a plunge, and then shrinking back. Doctor Bradley is oppressed with the "dangers and infirmities which the expert in any subject knows too well," and envies writers like Walter Bagehot, Goldwin Smith and Leslie Stephen, who, with no pretensions as "experts" in Shakespearean

¹In *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, by A. C. Bradley, Macmillan, 1909.

²Published by Macmillan, 1904.

³See Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 315, note. The lecture was delivered in 1904.

bibliography wrote about the man Shakespeare with a confidence of "broad and deep impressions which vivid reading leaves," untroubled and unchecked by "minutiae" and microscopic examination of wearisome "rival hypotheses."

Walter Bagehot, Goldwin Smith, and Leslie Stephen were men of robust rather than subtle minds. They loved great literature as great literature should be loved. They read their Shakespeare with high intelligence, their stout common sense told them that it was a man and not an amanuensis who wrote the plays and poems, and they closed the volume with fairly definite impressions of what manner of man he was. They wrote with broad understanding rather than with the close scrutiny which is so likely to beget skepticism.

Scrutiny and hypotheses and speculations inevitably blur a picture. Their pictures are not blurred. For instance Bagehot quotes from *Venus and Adonis* the stanzas about the hare hunt and remarks: "It is absurd, by the way, to say we know nothing about the man who wrote that; we know he had been after a hare"¹—a breezy, confident, characteristic Bagehot saying, refreshing as autumn air, and altogether plausible. But mincing scrutiny suggests doubts as to whether even this is indisputable.

Shakespeare described many other things with equal gusto and apparent experimental knowledge of the facts. But he could not have experienced everything about which he wrote. It is not supposable that he knew from experience what Lady Macbeth experienced when she dauntlessly entered King Duncan's death chamber, smeared the drunken grooms with the blood of the old king, came from the chamber, flaunting her crimson fingers in the face of her

¹*Shakespeare*; in *Works*, by Walter Bagehot, Hartford, Conn., edit., vol. I, p. 259.

trembling, murderous husband and said, defiantly, to arouse her husband to stiffer manhood:

My hands are of your color, but I shame
To wear a heart so white.

But unwittingly in the concentration of action she received a shock in the death chamber from which she never recovered, a shock not to be revealed until the months had passed and she had had time to brood, and, in forced inaction she lived over what she had seen in that dreadful room, a sight never to be blotted out, which comes back upon her in her somnambulism, when volition is weakened, resolution broken down, by suppression and illness, and she betrays herself in the wail, "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him."

Shakespeare imagined that as he imagined many other acute things which he had not personally experienced.

So niggling criticism may suggest it is possible that even the hare hunt represents an observation rather than an experience. One remembers Shelley sent by his mother to shoot game, bribing the game keeper to do the killing from which he shrank, a pained observer rather than a participant. A hardier than Shelley, Robert Burns ("of all poets most the man," said D. G. Rossetti) shrank with pain from the sight of a wounded hare and then roused himself to indignation against the hunter who had inflicted the wound.

Did Shakespeare hunt hares as Bagehot declares with refreshing confidence, or did he, like Shelley and Burns, merely look on, lamenting what he saw?

The description of the hare in the vivid stanzas suggests more of pity for the pursued creature than the hunter's zest in the pursuit: "the purblind hare," "the poor wretch," "poor wat," "the dew-bedabbled wretch," "his weary legs," the whole flashing description concluding with the lines:

For misery is trodden on by many,
And, being low, never relieved by any.

As in John Masefield's poem about the fox chase, the phrases suggest that the poet's sympathies were with the hunted dumb beast rather than with the exultant, noisy hunters.

A "modern note," say the historical critics, a sentiment more consonant with late eighteenth century "feeling for nature" and nineteenth century societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, than with sixteenth century "robustiousness." But the sentiment seems to be in Shakespeare's phrases, and who will confidently delimit the modernity of William Shakespeare?

In *As You Like It* "the melancholy Jaques grieves" at the sight of the wounded deer, and even the banished Duke who must live on the food of the forest or starve says of the deer:

And yet it irks me, the poor dappled fools,

* * * * *

Should in their own confines with forked heads

Have their round haunches gored.

Dramatic speeches, yes; words put into the mouths of fictitious creations of the poet's fancy, and not to be applied with confidence to Shakespeare's personal sentiments on the killing of wild game. But neither can it be confidently asserted that they were not his personal sentiments.

Thus it is that the "broad and deep impressions" of the "vivid" reader are blurred by the "infirmities which the expert knows too well," thus it is that by "thinking too precisely" on the writings of Shakespeare, line by line and phrase by phrase, the student finds his deductions "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," thus it is that in a field where great readers, like Bagehot, and Leslie Stephen and

Goldwin Smith tread confidently, the closer student of Shakespeare minces and falters and loses his way, and is not sure that Shakespeare's lines are indisputable proof of even so subordinate a fact as that the poet participated in a hare hunt.

A few months ago a shrewd, old Texas cattleman said to the present writer: "That fellow Shakespeare knew more about horses than a cowboy, than a *Texas* cowboy"—the climax and ultimate of horse-knowledge. One thinks that unbiased testimony like that must be true.

But when he undertakes to deduce a personal record from the writings, the microscopic critic falls into a morass of doubt.

Doctor Bradley does not escape the peril. Bagehot and Leslie Stephen and Goldwin Smith arrive somewhere in their conclusions as to what sort of man the writer of the plays and poems must have been, but Doctor Bradley arrives nowhere.

The only confident note in the essay is near the beginning, a broad (and true) assertion that "the great majority of Shakespeare's readers . . . do form from the plays some idea of the man," and that the man they image is more like Scott and Fielding than like Shelley or Wordsworth or Milton. As far as that clear assertion goes it is a true generalization, though even "the great majority of readers" must feel that Shakespeare had a trick of getting deeper under the skin of his creatures than did Scott or Fielding, in short that he was, with apologies to Professor Stoll for a word which he would taboo from Shakespearean commentary, rather more of a "psychologist" than either Scott or Fielding. After this bold classification of Shakespeare in a general catalogue of writers about whom we have much more personal and authentic knowledge than we have of Shake-

speare, Doctor Bradley begins to waver, as evidence rises in conflict with other evidence, and in the end we not only have not a specification of what Shakespeare was personally, we have not even a clear statement of what he was not.

This is the almost inevitable lot of anyone who has lived many years with the Shakespearean writings. However clear may be his own mental image of Shakespeare, he hesitates confidently to commit it to paper.

The chapter ends as it began. It would be pleasant to "pluck out the heart of the mystery," to say, "here within the lines is the veritable record of a man's earthly career," to say with Polonius

I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the centre;

but Polonius lived to learn that he did not really know Hamlet. It is better to stop before we begin, to confess that we cannot confidently reshape Shakespeare's personal career out of the lines he wrote, to admit that Will was Will-o'-the-Wisp.

II

AS A MAN THINKS

ABOUT the facts of Shakespeare's life his writings tell us little, about what he thought his writings tell us much. At least that is the belief of this writer.

In seeking and stating some of Shakespeare's personal and particular ways of looking at the world, the writer has not even a diminishing hope that he shall escape the contradictions into which nearly all writers about Shakespeare are sooner or later betrayed. A Scotsman who was asked if he had convinced his adversary in an argument replied, "Na, but I got in a fine glow."

This writer has glowed so often during the long years over the Shakespearean pages that rather more for his own satisfaction than for the enlightenment of the world, contemporaneous or posteric, he commits to paper a few of his impressions, well aware that the views are assailable, though he hopes and believes not arbitrary—views long in the forming, and hereinafter stated only in fragments.

It has long seemed to the writer a wanton waste of time to "read things into Shakespeare." It requires all one's acumen to read a few things out of Shakespeare.

Unlike Croce and Stoll, the writer is not afraid of being too subtle in his attempt to interpret a little of Shakespeare's "mind and art" (to use Doctor Dowden's phrase). He is convinced that neither he nor anybody else can be more subtle than Shakespeare. His only misgiving is lest his

subtlety may not be cut from the same bolt as Shakespeare's subtlety.¹

He is in entire agreement with Doctor Stoll about the folly of regarding the Shakespearean characters as actual, self-existent creatures. Of all misleading critical attitudes that is the worst. In the nineteenth century it led to a wilderness of foolish, sentimental writing, sometimes by closet students, sometimes by actors and actresses.

The players were excusable. After an actress has played the rôle of Rosalind many times it must seem to her, if she has a competent brain and imagination, that Rosalind is an actual young woman, with some strikingly modern traits (whatever is true to the life is and must be always "modern"). To the late Ellen Terry, whose supreme stage triumph was in *Merchant of Venice*, Portia must often have seemed more real than the people in the boxes and orchestra stalls.

This is a harmless illusion for one's self. It becomes mischievous only when one makes the illusion the starting point for critical commentary.

Probably the completest products of character creation in the English language are Falstaff, Hamlet, and Cleopatra, three people who seem to exist more by right of their own being than through the deliberate process of a fictionist's creation.² But even they are not real people. They are

¹Croce says: "He was less subtle but more profound, less involved, but more complex and more great than they [the critics]." *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, p. 334. Also Stoll, *passim*, in monographs and *Shakespeare Studies*, protests against subtleties of nineteenth century critics.

²Schücking, *Character Problems*, pp. 119-144, would not agree to this inclusion of Cleopatra, for he finds an incurable lesion between the representations of her in the first three and the last two acts: "attempts to prove that the Cleopatra of the last two acts bears the same physiognomy as that of the first part of the play must . . . be regarded, for the most part, as failures." Unhappily, dramatic criticism is not a science; the critic is often reduced to

results of Shakespeare's shaping imagination playing over or brooding upon some raw material which he found in books or old plays or in his observations of the human comedy in London and the countryside.

The present writer cannot go with Doctor Stoll in dismissing as absurd the idea that Shakespeare's creatures sometimes got away from him. Many lesser writers, varying from Thackeray downward, have testified that their fictitious characters did things quite unexpectedly to the authors themselves. Thackeray leaned back in his chair and marveled at what had happened when his pen wrote that Becky "admired" her husband when he made the physical assault on Lord Stein, even at the moment when Rawdon's appearance and attack were bringing all Becky's house in ruin down about her ears.

The present writer confesses that in 1917 he found corroboration of his own ideas on this little mystery of character creation in Professor E. H. Wright's essay on "*Reality and*

an expression of his own reactions. This writer cannot agree with Professor Schücking's impressive analysis of the failure of the poet to unify Cleopatra, to keep faith with Plutarch and the poet's own purpose. Schücking declares that the Cleopatra of the early acts is unqueenly, of the later acts queenly. But in the later acts she is no more the formal queen who "gives audiences" and "exercises the functions of her high office" than in the early acts. She is still, as she herself says, "No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded by such poor passion as the maid that milks and does the meanest chares." When Antony is dead she realizes, even as Schücking says, that she tried her tricks and perversities on Antony once too often. She had it given out that she had committed suicide. Hearing this, Antony does what Cleopatra pretended she had done. Now it is all over. The color has gone out of life. The world is empty. With one more flash of her incurable egotism she dies as a *Roman* would die. Schücking sums it up: "Donning her regal garments and placing her crown upon her head, she chooses rather to die with her majesty unsullied." In "this woman who now is inwardly as well as outwardly a queen" Schücking finds no resemblance to "the harlot of the first part." But is not this demanding that Cleopatra's conduct be logical? Her only logic is illogicality. Her essence is "infinite variety." Shakespeare has created not two different women in the two halves of the play, but one woman of multiple personalities.

Inconsistency in Shakespeare's Characters,"¹ and that in the years that have lapsed he has not ceased to be grateful to Professor Wright for that essay. He takes his stand with Wright and Herford in that view that, while the characters are the products of the pen, not of the breath of God, the characters probably did some things quite unanticipated by Shakespeare when he began to create them. In this little controversy this writer is against Doctor Stoll who pronounces such commentary "an unscholarly, untenable point of view."²

Surely Professor Stoll himself has experienced the self-surprise of finding something going down on his page quite unexpectedly. So brilliant a writer as he cannot always keep to the prescribed syllabus. Only wooden writers do that.

Woodrow Wilson, both before and after he became President of the United States, used to laugh and say: "I catch myself in animated conversation or in the warmth of public speaking saying 'I have often thought thus and so,' when I really have never thought it before"—meaning not that he intentionally said what was untrue, but that in the first impact of the thought, the impression seemed so true, so "inevitable" (to use Wordsworth's expression) that it produced the effect of having always been a part of his thought. If these surprises occur in conversation, expository public speech, in the creations of novelists, even in the writing of literary commentary, why doubt that Shakespeare himself was sometimes surprised by a character saying something which he had not beforehand planned?

When Goneril in the supreme crisis of her life gasps "An interlude!"³ her laconic exclamation says more than torrents

¹*Shaksperian Studies*, by Members of the Department of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University Press, 1916.

²*Ibid.*, p. 120 and footnote.

³*King Lear*, Act V, sc. 3, line 89.

of speech, and it is not fanciful to suppose that that effective stroke was an inspiration of the moment rather than a pre-calculated item in a prefatory scenario.

When in the last scene of *Othello*, Iago is led back a prisoner where Desdemona and Emilia are dead because of Iago's villainy and when he is brought face to face with the woe-tortured Othello, it is a plausible assumption that it was a poet's momentary inspiration which prompted Shakespeare to put into Othello's mouth the gorgeous line, "I look down toward his feet, but that's a fable." Iago has feet, not the hoofs of the conventional devil.

Sometimes these momentary inspirations led to surface inconsistencies, and sometimes they led to real inconsistencies. Sometimes the inconsistencies are no more than the inconsistencies natural to human beings tossed to and fro on the waves of their own emotions—emotion is seldom logical.

Sometimes the inconsistencies are inexplicable on any other theory than that of Doctor Stoll that Shakespeare simply overlooked the inconsistency. Again there is the case of Thackeray who killed off an old lady in one chapter and forgetting that he had done so brought her back in a later chapter blithely alive. Thackeray caught his error when he edited his serial for a bound novel. Sometimes Shakespeare never caught his errors at all, or if he did, the printers and editors had not access to the revised manuscript.

Doctor Stoll offers the only realistic and plausible suggestion for the statement in Iago's second speech in *Othello* that Cassio has a wife, though no wife appears in the play or is ever referred to again, namely that Shakespeare found in Cinthio's story on which he founded the play that Cassio had a wife, then as the play proceeded he realized that no wife was necessary to the story as he was dramatizing it, omitted further reference to this negligible lady and simply

forgot that he had mentioned her in the twenty-first line of the play. To which may be added the speculation that possibly in repeated performances of the play Shakespeare may have instructed the actor who played Iago to omit the line which refers to Cassio's wife (the line can be dropped without marring the effect of the speech—indeed dropping it “tightens up” the speech) but failed to delete the line in the script. Other oversights are not so easily explained away—are indeed among the things which Ben Jonson may have had in mind when he fervently wished that Shakespeare had “blotted” (that is to say erased) many lines from his plays. Shakespeare was not infallible.

The present writer takes these characters, then, as products of a man's imagination and pen, not as results of a divine fiat, takes them in their flaws as well as their merits, and comments on them accordingly. With all his admiration of Shakespeare he is under no obligation to defend Shakespeare's art. It is great enough as it stands in its defects and triumphs. It is a better defense of itself than any commentator can make of it.

But the writer purposes to go beyond this to permit himself liberty of assumption that Shakespeare's own thoughts may be detected here and there, especially when the same thought is repeated in many different situations through the mouths of many different characters.

Among the false proverbs about Shakespeare is that he “never repeats himself.” He repeats himself continually. And in the very repetitions there is a suggestion of an echo of Shakespeare's own personal thoughts. He was one of the most objective of writers, but being such did not inhibit him from sometimes taking the liberty of saying the things which he, William Shakespeare, really believed.

Here this writer is about to part company with the valu-

able, modern, realistic, historical criticism for whose corrective touch he is grateful. He is going to comment a little on the philosophy, yes and even the psychology, of the plays and poems. In defense he can say only that for at least thirty years the plays of Shakespeare have seemed to him, in his personal experiences and in his observations of the experiences of others, so apt a commentary on human life, individual and in association with other lives, that he cannot divest himself of the conception that there is in the plays a rather definite point of view, a very real philosophy. Not a philosophy which can be reduced to categories, but a philosophy which fits the facts of human experience rather better than does most formalized philosophy, better even than other philosophy in literary form with which this writer is acquainted, excepting only the philosophy of the Bible—which exception he makes not to square himself with orthodoxy but simply because the Bible really is superior to Shakespeare as a philosophy of life.

Shakespeare probably had little deliberate intention to philosophize, no intention to teach. He was by profession and by practice a showman. Wordsworth said, "I wish either to be considered as a teacher or as nothing," but it is because he happened to be a poet (sometimes) that his teaching has survived. Practical Shakespeare doubtless wished the theatre-going public to regard him primarily as a showman. But it happened that he also was a poet, and it also happened that he was a bit of a philosopher. When philosophy touches the issues of life and death it trenches on the solemnity of a sermon though the poet-philosopher had no sermonic intention. Colonel Robert Ingersoll told young Miss Marlowe: "*Julia, Macbeth* is the greatest sermon that was ever preached," and the more Miss Marlowe studied the play the more she became impressed by its solemn lessons.

It would not have been a great play if Shakespeare had written it deliberately to warn people against unbridled ambition. Few poets except Dante have contrived deliberately to weld dogma and art—Milton was imperfectly successful. But *Macbeth* would not be one of the most famous things in literature (the bane of schoolboys, the marvel of poets and ponderers) if it had not carried between the lines lessons applicable to people in the clutch of any temptation. It is a parable not only for potential murderers, but for all who are tempted to let their imaginations play with forbidden things.

Even after it was finished Shakespeare was not necessarily fully aware of its universal and terrific applicability. We cannot know what Shakespeare thought about that. All that is clear is that he felt no obligation to put the "lesson" or "sermon" in permanent form for posterity, for the careless Shakespeare (so careful about temporal things, like real estate investments, so careless about perpetuating his dramatic work) left it to the hazards of chance, died with *Macbeth* unprinted. It was not published until seven years after his death when his old friends Heminges and Condell coöperated with the publisher Jaggard to issue a collective edition of Shakespeare's plays.

But Emerson, something of an artist as well as a philosopher, refers to people "who builded better than they knew." If we take sonnet 29 as an expression of Shakespeare's personal feeling, it would seem that he was aware of that other side of art, its incapacity to express all the artist conceived (its "grasp" falling short of its "reach," as Browning put it) :

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope
With what I most enjoy contented least,

wrote Shakespeare in the sonnet.

Whether there is anything in his writing expressing the Emersonian ideas, the writer of this essay does not now recall, but so it is perhaps with every real artist, he "builided better than he knew."

Sonnet 55 opens in a boastful strain:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

Shakespeare seems to have set some store by his non-dramatic poetry, but seems not to have anticipated posterity poring over his plays.

Yet the plays live: partly because they are good shows, partly because they are good poetry, partly because they are sound wisdom.

With all their tricks of the trade, the theatrical trade, a trade and the tricks thereof known better to no showman of the time than to Shakespeare, with all their shocking violations of character credibility, with all their mechanical soliloquies, such as those of Richard the Third, some of Iago's, and, worst of all, the soliloquy with which Prince Hal closes the second scene of the first act of the first part of *King Henry the Fourth*, with all the theatrical "business," with all that and much else that is arbitrary and artificial there is in the plays something which looks so much like psychology that the present writer accepts it as such—even in the face of Professor Stoll's protests.

Giving a name to a thing is not inventing it. Apples had been falling to the ground a long time before Sir Isaac Newton worked out a "law" of gravitation. Pendulous objects had been swaying a long time before Galileo stated the principle of the pendulum. There were operations of the human mind in normal and abnormal conditions a long time before the word "psychology" was coined. And though Shakespeare never heard the word he sometimes wrote with

a penetrating understanding of the phenomena which the word connotes. Indeed he wrote so perceivingly that some modern psychologists turn to his pages to illustrate principles.

The present writer made this discovery two or three years ago when he was meditating a different sort of work than this on Shakespeare, a profounder work.

He had studied psychology so long ago that it was called "metaphysics." He had read that old classic, now out of print, *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare*, by Doctor Bucknell, a specialist in mental diseases before the word "psychiatry" had been invented. He had read many articles on abnormal psychology in Shakespeare, some in transactions of The Shakespeare Society, some by medical men, some by laymen in the Variorum edition,¹ but had dropped all this long ago. Circumstances however renewed his interest in psychic phenomena in Shakespeare's plays and he meditated a little book on the subject, knowing it would be an amateurish book, but hoping that it might provoke someone better qualified to write a better book.

Being psychologically out of date he collected and read some modern books on the subject merely as background for his undertaking, hoping at most to find some scientific support for his preconceptions of Shakespeare's intuitive understanding of cerebral and nervous phenomena. He discovered that some of the most "hard-boiled" modern psychologists while reporting clinical cases—Mr. A., Mrs. B., Miss X., analyzed and discussed Lady Macbeth, Lear, and Hamlet as "cases." It seemed a professional corroboration of his naïf suspicion.

Then an eminent New York psychiatrist made the un-

¹Especially in the Variorum edition of *Hamlet*, edited by H. H. Furness, vol. II, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1877 and 1905, pp. 195-235.

solicited and astonishing statement that "only in the last fifteen years has psychiatry caught up with Shakespeare." Not even Coleridge ever said anything seemingly more exaggerative. It out-eulogized the Shakespeare eulogists. It would be a worthless remark from a mere litterateur, but the source made it interesting—a renowned, practicing physician, a man of science, young enough to get the most recent points of view in his specialty, old enough to have examined and treated thousands of patients in this country and abroad during the strain of the Great War, professional enough to assess mental phenomena, sufficiently a lover of books to have read Shakespeare attentively.

Which last remark calls for another. Prior to this professional testimony, another famous specialist in nervous and mental diseases had told the writer that "Shakespeare's madmen are merely stage madmen." This seemed to cut the ground from under the presuppositions of the amateur until he discovered that the great physician knew about all that was knowable concerning flesh-and-blood madmen but knew very little about Shakespeare. In his busy life of practice and study and writing of scientific articles he had found no leisure to read Shakespeare attentively.

Evidently the prerequisites for a modern book on Shakespearean abnormal psychology—the sort of book the amateur had hoped he might outrage some specialist into writing—are knowledge both of Shakespeare and abnormal psychology. What this writer had intended to make into a book is only a "trace of color" in the present writing. The evidence is overwhelming that in some way, God knows how, this extraordinary Shakespeare got an insight into processes of brain and emotion which singularly resemble some of the most modern findings.

Shakespeare wrote as a poet, not as a specialist, had

intuitions where a specialist has knowledge, could diagnose nobody, but could create people out of his imagination and observation whom modern men of science "explain."

One with a Shakespearean insight may know human nature in the concrete so well as to illustrate in anticipation the discoveries of the psychiatrists, psychologists and philosophers. And that is precisely what Shakespeare seems to have done.

Certainly Shakespeare never heard of the "inferiority complex," and maybe the next generation of psychologists will deny that such a phenomenon exists. Nevertheless Prince Hamlet, strong and at the same time weak ("a strength girt round with weakness," as Shelley called himself), urged from without and within to a severe duty, but baffled by a depressive sense of his own inadequacy, behaves as if he were afflicted with whatever the ailment is which at present is called the "inferiority complex." Whatever the truth about the "subconscious self," or whether there is a subconscious self, Lady Macbeth behaves as people sometimes actually behave after a profound nervous shock of which they were unconscious when the shock came to them.

After all, and Doctor Stoll to the contrary notwithstanding, it seems to this writer that besides an author's deliberate intention there are other meanings in his work. Long ago James Russell Lowell observed that Dante means different things when approached from different angles. That is indisputable. The devout Roman Catholic and the avowed agnostic find meanings in *The Divine Comedy*, but the meanings are not the same.

Professor Stoll is severe in his criticism of this attitude. Satisfied that Shakespeare intended in Shylock a comic villain, he is ironical about the modernized "pathetic" Shylock, as Professor Brander Matthews and others ("the number of

them is fewer than it used to be," says Stoll) would make it. With quiet sarcasm Stoll says, as if paraphrasing those who would "modernize" Shakespeare's meanings: "What Shakespeare intended does not much matter—what matters is what he did—and we have as good a right as Shakespeare to our opinions of Shylock, though [quoting Professor Matthews] 'the comic aspects of Shylock have disappeared from our modern vision and the pathetic interest of the desolate figure is now most obvious.'¹ Art then ceases to be a means of communication from soul to soul, the author and his meaning are a matter of indifference, and there is really no work of interpretation, but only of expatiation to do. Apart from Shakespeare's opinion, what Shylock is there? One wonders bewildered."²

This is tonic. This is the strong wind of reality, blowing away the fogs of metaphysical and willful modernization. But sometimes the wind blows too hard, destroys.

Are there really no overtones in literary art? Is there really only one meaning in art, and that the artist's explicit meaning? Must everyone get precisely the author's meaning, or no meaning at all? A child and its mother witnessing a performance of Maeterlinck's *Bluebird*—do they get the same meaning from the episode of the little blue children impatient to be aboard the galley of life, and the song of the waiting mothers in the distance? Which gets Maeterlinck's meaning—the child or the mother? Either? Both? Neither?

Undoubtedly, the ground is more solid under the feet of the historical commentator when he is learned and competent, like Professor Stoll. But are the horizons, possibly, narrower?

¹*Shakespeare as a Playwright*, by Brander Matthews, Scribner's, 1913, p. 151.

²*Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 331–332.

Shakespeare's comic Shylock (assuming that Shakespeare kept consistently to his initial conception, and drew nothing but a comic Shylock) is not very interesting on the modern stage, if one may judge from having witnessed Ben Greet's performance of Shylock as comedy. Must there be no Shylock, then, on the modern stage? Grant that David Warfield's Shylock was oversentimentalized, that Henry Irving's Shylock was too realistic a Jew of the Ghetto, that half a dozen lesser Shylocks have been inadequate, what of Edwin Booth's Shylock? Doctor Stoll is scarcely old enough to have seen Booth as Shylock, but we who did see the performance know that, without altering the lines, Booth presented an unforgettable Shylock who was not comic.

This writer must believe that the greater Shakespearean plays have wider significances than were always perceived by Shakespeare's contemporary audiences, that there are surplusages of meaning in them when read in the light of widened human experience. Why this should be so, the writer does not undertake to say, for, being an old-fashioned person, he accepts the old-fashioned view that, after all our fresh biological learning, the mystery of genius still remains a mystery. Eugenics can do much, but eugenics cannot breed Shakespeares—at least not yet.

In a longer book which this writer hopes to perpetrate he purposes to argue out the thesis, with plentiful supporting citations from the plays, that not only by repetitions but also by the "drift" of Shakespeare's writings, it becomes more than plausible that Shakespeare, with all his flaming genius, was essentially conservative, in his dramatic technique, and in his political, judicial, ethical, and religious views.

That he was conservative in his dramatic technique is demonstrable from his practice when that is studied against the background of Elizabethan-Jacobean stage usage. He

was not an innovator, like Ben Jonson, or even Heywood, or Beaumont and Fletcher.

The rest is more debatable, his political, judicial, ethical, and religious conservatism. That is a conclusion (disputed by some) derivable from the "drift" of his thoughts and his repetitions in varying circumstances. What is to be argued out in another volume can be only summarized now. The English historical plays indicate to some of us that Shakespeare was a firm supporter of constituted authority under the crown. To those who say that there is nothing personal in this, that it was the universal attitude in the age of Elizabeth, the retort is simple—the Essex rebellion, in which Shakespeare's friend Southampton was involved. The bane of faction, the puissance of England under a united government, seems to be an underlying theme of Shakespeare's stirring dramatization of the English Civil Wars of the fifteenth century.

Though the plea for mercy is reiterated in his plays, the general attitude of the plays, as has been noted by others, is one of profound respect for law and order.

Even so iconoclastic a writer as Frank Harris was impressed by the evidence of the plays that Shakespeare refused to muddle his judgment concerning the ineradicable distinction between right and wrong. "Truth is truth to the end of reckoning," is a dramatic phrase uttered by Isabella in *Measure for Measure*,¹ but it seems to sum up Shakespeare's own view—in contrast to some of the sophistries of some of his contemporaries. Even the aloof Doctor Stoll quotes with approval Coleridge's great utterance: "Keeping at all times in the high road of life Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice;—he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach

¹ Act V, lines 45, 46.

us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher." The source and center of human tragedy, in the Shakespearean conception, seems to lurk in emotion getting from under control of will and judgment. Oddly enough, Shakespeare puts his most succinct statement of this ethical view into the mouth of the prince of rascals, Iago, in one famous speech.¹ Iago is a utilitarian (as well as a cynic), but he knows, intellectually, the paths that lead to the road to ruin. Omit the sinister application which Iago makes of knowledge (which he has never transmuted into wisdom), omit the first and last clauses of his speech, and you have the clearest statement Shakespeare ever made in a single passage of the causes of the woe which befell most of the protagonists of his great tragedies: "Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners." Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Coriolanus, Macbeth, Mark Antony—they all lived to learn the truth of this, the fatality of failing to act in accord with this truth.

Sidney Lanier, true understander of Shakespeare though he was, catalogued among the things on which Shakespeare is silent, religion. Alwin Thaler, in a recent book,² sees deeper, "can see no reason for including religion among Shakespeare's silences." By religion, on which Shakespeare is "silent," Lanier must have meant dogma, or some Brown-ingesque attempt to probe the secret of life beyond the portals of death. Of these things, it is true, there is nothing in Shakespeare. If he was a sectarian the evidence does not appear in the lines, and at the grave's edge he is silent. But if religion means, in one aspect, a recognition here on earth of the over-ruling power of a Supreme Being, who

¹*Othello*, Act I, sc. 3, lines 322-337.

²*Shakespeare's Silences*, by Alwin Thaler, Harvard University Press, 1929, p. 5.

walks with us in all our walking, who is ever present whether we remember him or forget him, who "shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," then there is profound religion in the book of Shakespeare.

In summary, the mind and spirit of Shakespeare are discoverable in his writings. There is no certain record in what he wrote of the occurrences of his life, but a very clear record of what and how he thought.

III

SHOWMAN AND ARTIST

THE revolt against nineteenth century commentary on Shakespeare as closet drama has been wholesome.

Oversight of the simple fact that Shakespeare wrote his plays as a commercial venture, to catch and hold the attention of audiences, led to many fantastic, gossamer theories, comments and annotations.

With the rise and development of historical and technical scholarship, many cobwebs have been swept from Shakespearean commentary. The new criticism began with a fresh emphasis upon the fact, long almost ignored, that Shakespeare's plays were written for stage performance,¹ and that a playwright in any age must take his audience along with him, must make clear the situation and action, must inform his audience. "Audience" means "hearers," and people get less through their ears than through their eyes bent upon printed words.² Then some thirty years of research brought to light much knowledge about the physical stage³ in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period and a clearer understanding of how this governed the playwrights' technique—a stage and technique in many ways different from modern conditions and modern usage. All this was valuable.

¹An eminent pioneer in this study was Professor George P. Baker, with his *Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*, Macmillan, 1907. The editors of the volumes in the *Arden Shakespeare* series, D. C. Heath & Company, were also early in the field.

²Cf. Schücking, pp. 18-21.

³The workers in this field have been and are numerous; among them: C. Brodmeier, William Archer, W. J. Lawrence, A. H. Thorndike, V. E. Albricht, G. F. Reynolds, G. K. Chambers, and (again) G. P. Baker.

At present, however, there is danger of overemphasizing the merely theatrical aspect of Shakespeare's work. Criticism from that point of view alone will distort the Shakespearean product as much in one direction as closet criticism distorted it in the other direction. In short, Shakespearean criticism may become too objective, too "external." The criticism of Coleridge and Schlegel needs to be supplemented and often corrected by criticism from behind the scenes, but this does not mean that Coleridge and Schlegel are obsolete.

Much of Shakespeare must be understood as mere showmanship, an endeavor by hook or crook to get the story across to the audience. But because Shakespeare was a remarkable poet and something of a philosopher he loaded his plays with excess baggage, with surplusage over and above what was necessary to make the plays "go." Why he did this is not far to seek. An artist must put art into his product, even when his showman sense tells him that the shadings, nuances, surplusage, will add nothing to the selling value of his commodity. An artist must satisfy his sense of art in so far as circumstances will permit.

Sometimes limitations of time and space compel a playwright to violate his artistic conscience, to do things which he knows are false both to credibility and to art, and then the showman has the upper hand of the artist. Sometimes it is possible to blend exhibition with art and then there is pleasant harmony. Sometimes the artist defies the playwright and overloads his lines with meanings superfluous to showmanship but inherent in the artist's instinct for the way the thing should be done.

Often when this happened in the case of Shakespeare, there resulted a double meaning in his lines, the obvious meaning which a first performance audience would get, a sweep of poetry with a general sense sufficiently clear to

carry the audience along with the action; and a latent "in-between-the-lines" meaning which at first only Shakespeare clearly understood but which becomes comprehensible to the student who scrutinizes the lines carefully, who perceives that practical, experienced Shakespeare, the showman, must have known that the subtleties were too fine for an audience to catch, but were not too obtrusive to confuse the audience as to the drift of the story, and which pleased the artistic sense of Shakespeare himself. And, after all, the artist himself is the person whom the artist is most compelled to please, even as young John Keats, most Shakespearean of nineteenth century English poets, said in a notable letter to his publisher.

Anticipating an example which will be dwelt upon later, there are in *King Lear* striking instances of double meaning. Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences delighted in sensational effects, and among the sensations they craved and got was the raving of madmen. The drama of the age is vocal with the shrieks of maniacs and the clanking of their chains. Shakespeare showed his audience a raving lunatic in Lear, enough to excite the audience and forward the story, but while presenting Lear in his delirium Shakespeare satisfied his artistic taste and his acute understanding of the operations of distraught minds by making Lear rave, as we now say, "psychologically."

The audience got the desired spectacular effect. Shakespeare and we who can read the play reflectively line by line perceive the underlying psychology. Parenthetically, it may be remarked that here is the line of division between too many Shakespearean actors and those that profess to be Shakespearean scholars; it is no uncommon experience to hear an actor say "Shakespeare is very simple"—and in one aspect of him he is, but alas and alack, the actors who say this are

precisely the actors who give very unsatisfying performances of Shakespeare, who obviously have never probed his depths, who substitute declamation for profound interpretation. Edwin Booth realized that Shakespeare was sometimes simple but sometimes profound and complex. One needs more than a good voice, a good memory and a good stage presence to act the greater rôles in Shakespeare; he needs to be also something of a philosopher—Shakespeare himself was.

There are three fairly distinct stages of impression in studying Shakespeare's best work: first, a long sweep of poetry and situation which gives a general idea of story and character; secondly, a rereading which exposes much that seems arbitrary, artificial, unlikely both in situation and character, a violation of credibility due to the fact that Shakespeare had to "put across" his stories; then comes a third step—it comes only from very close reading—a perception that in brief, swift lines, in parenthetical phrases, sometimes in mere ejaculations, Shakespeare was giving a subtle credibility to that which is superficially incredible.

IV

THE SHOWMAN

BY no means does Shakespeare always do that third thing.¹ Sometimes he is writing too hurriedly to do it. Sometimes the type of play he is writing or the artificial plot on which he is working will not permit the nuances without clouding the story, and as a practical playwright he must keep the story clear.

Doubtless, the story, the thing that interested the audience most, was that which interested Shakespeare least. But he was a practical business man with pressing obligations to himself and his business associates to make the theatrical concern to which he belonged a dividend-producing affair. That could be done only by drawing audiences to the theatre, and audiences could be drawn only by entertainment. So Shakespeare the artist, sometimes capitulated to Shakespeare the entertainer, and things were staged which probably gave Shakespeare the artist little artistic satisfaction.

Believing that this is a fair analysis of what has come down to us under the title of *Shakespeare's Complete Works*, it may be unwise to add a speculation in full knowledge that the speculation may not accord with the facts. However, one sometimes asks himself whether it is possible that Shakespeare's neglect to anticipate Ben Jonson by collecting his own plays in a permanent edition may have been due in part to dissatisfaction with what he had written, a recollection of his writing in mass rather than in detail, a remembrance

¹See the concluding paragraph of the preceding lecture.

not of how often he had written as pure artist, but rather of how often he had permitted business exigencies to betray, suppress, distort the artist that was in him. It is admittedly a fancy, but it is a plausible fancy that the fastidious artist, recalling how much shoddy he had perpetrated for gain, felt that his writings as a whole were not worth preserving. He had accomplished his practical objects of helping to make the Globe Company a going concern, of supporting his family, and of accumulating a competency on which he could retire. Having done so, it is barely possible that he preferred to forget the whole London experience in which he had so often strangled the artist in order to provide the showman with a living.

Be that as it may, there are two indisputable facts: first that Shakespeare went to his grave without turning a hand to preserve his plays for posterity; and, secondly, that in his complete works there is a vast deal of which a sensitive artist had abundant reason to be heartily ashamed.

Some of this was left-over stuff in an old play which he revised, pulled about, retouched for his company's use, like, for instance, the obscene portrait of Joan of Arc in *First Henry The Sixth*. Some of it was later interpolation by another writer, like the vacuous, tinkling lines which Hecate pronounces in *Macbeth*. Some of it was quite possibly the contribution of a collaborator whom Shakespeare engaged to fill out a scene of which he had grown weary, like the journeyman balderdash of the vision of Posthumus in the fifth act of *Cymbeline*.

But much of the inferior stuff was written by Shakespeare himself.

Sometimes because he was in a hurry to finish his job, as in the huddled conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*, where he marries off Paulina, a high-spirited widow, to the excellent

Camillo, though until the very last speech in the play no intimation had been given that Paulina and Camillo were contemplating matrimony in the abstract or were in the least inclined to each other.

Sometimes he was compelled by the plot of the story which he was dramatizing to violate probability of individual action, as when he had Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, a young woman whose will power is in excellent working order, accept without question the monstrous provision in her father's last will and testament that she shall marry the first chance stranger who shall select a designated one of three metal caskets.

Sometimes he was afraid of his audience, as when he composed for Prince Hal the wretched soliloquy with which the second scene of the first act of *First King Henry the Fourth* ends—schemings of a calculating politician, which violate the spontaneous spirit of the young prince, an excuse which negatives the only real excuse for Hal's taste for taverns and low company, namely Hal's prankish disposition and his weariness of the portentous solemnity of court life under the rule of his hypochondriacal and conscience-stricken father. There can be but one explanation of that soliloquy, so out of character with the prince: Shakespeare was showing a patriotic audience one of their esteemed, national heroes in quite unheroic escapades, and early in the play he had to reassure the audience that their hero was coming out all right in the end, and he could think of no better way to stave off a theatre riot than to make Hal say things which the real Hal, as created by Shakespeare, never could have said.

Sometimes there was just a lapse in his master faculty of character motivation, as when he made Mark Antony in the third scene of the second act of *Antony and Cleopatra* a

hypocrite, which is the one thing faulty that Shakespeare's Antony is not. Shakespeare's Antony is politic, facile, easily adaptable, pleasure-loving, self-indulgent, sensuous and sensual, swift and sudden in his changing moods, but not hypocritical.¹ Aside from his genius and his Roman valor, with a remnant of Roman dignity even to the sad ending of his career, his outstanding virtue is candor.² Knowing his own failings, he admits them freely to himself and others. Having shaken off the "strong Egyptian fetters," namely Cleopatra, he returns to Rome, to a man's life, and enters into an honorable marriage with an honorable woman, Octavia, to whom he says with engaging frankness:

I have not kept my square; but that to come
Shall all be done by rule.

Octavia believes, and we have a right to believe, that Antony means what he says, that he has turned the corner, closed the old book, and opened a new one.

And yet this frank, attractive Antony only about thirty lines down the page says:

I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' the East my pleasure lies.

It is a contradiction in character, in the character of the man with whom we have been in company through five acts of *Julius Caesar* and an act and a half of *Antony and Cleopatra*, whom we feel we have come to know intimately in his genius,

¹Only a superficial reader can ascribe hypocrisy to Antony in the first scene of the third act of *Julius Caesar*. He makes terms with the conspirators as a politician, but as a man and friend of Caesar he is candid beyond the average of even respectable politicians.

²In his public capacity, he is a supreme demagogue, as in the oration over Caesar's body. He will turn this world tragedy to his political advancement. But he genuinely loved Caesar. Politically, he is a demagogue, but as G. K. Chesterton observes, there is a vein of sincerity in most successful demagogues. Demagoguery and personal hypocrisy are quite different things.

his charm, and his faults—among which is not hypocrisy. But Shakespeare knew he had to get Antony back to Egypt and Cleopatra some way, for that's the story. And so he commits an abominable blunder in motivation.

The most amazing thing is that right in the pages of Plutarch, from which he is drawing his story, the true motivation is given. Military strategy requires Antony's presence in Syria. Syria is perilously near Egypt. Weariness of the respectability of Octavia and propinquity to Cleopatra do the work for mercurial Antony. "*Then,*" says Plutarch, "began this pestilent plague and mischief of Cleopatra's love, which had slept a long time and seemed to have been utterly forgotten, and that Antonius had given place to better counsel, again to kindle and be in force so soon as Antonius came near to Syria."

For once Plutarch is a better psychologist than Shakespeare. It is not easy to see why Shakespeare did not follow Plutarch's leading here as he followed Plutarch in so much else concerning Antony (not concerning Cleopatra—that gorgeous creation is almost all Shakespeare's). Instead of following a natural development, Shakespeare brought in the soothsayer to warn Antony back to Egypt, a poor substitute for Plutarch's true perception. Shakespeare followed Plutarch in postponing for some time Antony's return to Egypt. So there was, clearly, no necessity for lugging in Antony's lapse just thirty lines after his pledge to Octavia. Surely it would have been better art and better humanity if Shakespeare had deleted the line "Though I make this marriage for my peace," had sent Antony to Syria, and there, in the suggestions of propinquity and ennui over Octavia, described by Enobarbus as "of a holy, cold and still conversation," in yearning for what Antony himself, later in the play, calls "one other gaudy night," had felt the clutch of the old

temptation beyond resistance, and had in Syria uttered the words: "I will to Egypt. I' the East my pleasure lies."

The shrewd Enobarbus knew from the outset that Rome and Octavia could not indefinitely hold Antony back from "his Egyptian dish." But Antony should not have known it when he married Octavia. Antony in the grip of his old passion, returning to Cleopatra and ruin, is understandable, is harmonious with the Antony that Shakespeare has drawn with consummate art; but committing duplicity is not harmonious with the Antony of Shakespeare's imagination.

A flaw in the art, this, rather difficult to explain unless on the supposition that Shakespeare even when writing this poetic masterpiece, this *Antony and Cleopatra*, was in a hurry, and took the shortest cut to a close, the reunion with Cleopatra and the ruin of Antony.

Sometimes the compass of a drama, "the two-hour traffic of the stage," was too circumscribed for the transformation of character which Shakespeare undertook to show. *Othello* is a classic example of this. Everybody who knows anything about dramatic art, either professionally or theoretically, knows that *Othello* is a masterpiece of craftsmanship. But as a convincing picture of a man's deterioration, under distorting passion, from noble dignity to ignoble behavior, the play has been frequently attacked, from Thomas Rymer's historical assault on it in the late seventeenth century,¹ to Doctor Stoll's withering analysis of it only a few years ago.²

With no time to enter into a discussion involving much detail, it must be admitted first: that Shakespeare attempts a task more suitable to a full-length, analytical novel than to a compressed play; what happens to *Othello* is not in-

¹Thomas Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 1693. Republished in vol. II, of *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, edited by J. E. Spingarn, Oxford, 1908.

²In the monograph on *Othello*, previously cited.

credible; it is only the rapidity with which it happens that taxes credulity; and secondly, that it is chiefly because the play is so great that it has been so often anatomized and condemned as unnatural. Every season plays have successful runs on Broadway which are more incredible than *Othello*, but audiences and critics accept the incredibility on the theory that "they are just plays and plays cannot be as real as life." But *Othello* is so masterly and is so nearly "true" that its flaws challenge the critics' attention.

How carefully Shakespeare strove to make Othello's unjustifiable jealousy natural is seen when Othello is compared with Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. In the latter play Shakespeare was writing what he knew was an artificial type of drama, the Fletcherian type, and he does not attempt to make natural the jealousy of Leontes. Leontes comes nearer to the Ben Jonson formula of a man in his "humor," a creature of one passion, than to the normal, Shakespearean conception of a man as a mixture of conflicting motives and emotions. The jealousy of Leontes is so incredible that the incredibility is accepted and the beautiful play is read and enjoyed for its poetry and romance and for its superb characters of Hermione and Paulina. Leontes is not submitted to a clinical examination because he is obviously not a diseased man, but a disease itself. Othello, on the other hand, is so human, so much an actual understandable man that people (ordinary readers and play-goers as well as scholars and critics) inevitably fall to asking if such a man could be so tragically hoodwinked.

It is believable that when Shakespeare wrote this play, at the zenith of his creative powers, he thought he had laid down the premises rationally for the transformation.

It is evident that Shakespeare took no pains to make the jealousy of Leontes credible. Leontes' jealousy is merely the

springboard from which Shakespeare leaps into the dramatic action. Grant Leontes' preposterous jealousy, and the rest follows fairly sequentially. The play is an illustration of Macaulay's exaggerated dictum that if we grant a poet's premise the conclusion becomes inevitable, but that only a poet or a madman would set up the premise. In the case of Leontes the premise was laid down by one who was not only a poet but also a showman. He must get his story started and he starts it with the jealousy of Leontes, jealous from the outset (maugre a brief dialogue with Prolixenes urging him to postpone his return to Bohemia).

In the case of Othello the task was less arbitrary, more difficult: the author must show a reversal of Othello's nature from nobility to ignobility—and it may be added, back again to a sombre, stricken nobility. The real test of the difference between the two characters is in the all but universal reaction to them of readers and audiences. However much of a fool Othello is to permit himself to be so deceived (and when critics call him a "fool" they call him exactly what Othello calls himself in the last scene) he enlists pity for the misery which he suffers. Leontes does not enlist pity.

Othello is much older than Desdemona, he is a foreigner, he is a Moor, he has known nothing of sophisticated city life, he has known nothing of women, he is a blunt man whose mental processes are simple, no intellectual like Hamlet, no keen, shrewd intelligence like Iago who betrays him. Though poised and dignified, he has within him possibilities of passionate outbursts, as Shakespeare adroitly shows in Othello's uncontrollable anger when those responsible for order in the garrison violate the order—this before a suggestion of jealousy in Othello. It is a forewarning that such a man once roused will be dangerous. Desdemona's father contributes to the transformation by warning Othello that a

woman who has deceived her father may deceive her husband, a warning that means nothing to Othello in his happy, hymeneal dawn but which crashes upon his memory with paralyzing force when his suspicions have been roused and when Iago repeats, or echoes, what old Brabantio had said. Desdemona herself contributes to the transformation by her little, frightened lie, when she tells her husband that she has the handkerchief which he a little later sees with his own eyes in the hand of the suspected Cassio.

Some critics have scoffed the idea that Shakespeare had any precise conception of the disadvantage which Othello's race and color put him under. Those critics have surely failed to read the play carefully, to note the repeated references to Othello's nationality and color. They have, perhaps, not read Cinthio's story, from which Shakespeare took his plot, in which story Desdemona says explicitly: "You Moors are of so hot a nature that every little trifle moves you to anger and revenge." A hint like that was a sufficient starting point for the wild sweep of passion which Shakespeare showed in his play. Shakespeare may have known nothing of race psychology but he knew a dramatic motif when he saw it, and he saw one such in Cinthio's fragile story.

As a proposition in the abstract, it is difficult to see how anything else could have occurred than the thing which did occur, Othello being what he was, Iago being what he was, and the circumstances being what they were.

Balzac or Dostoevski, working on such people and circumstances deliberately and in detail in a three-decker novel, would have made the transformation so natural that nobody would have questioned its naturalness. It is the rapidity with which Shakespeare brings about the transformation that challenges skepticism. The transformation takes place in one scene.

Even within the brief compass of a play Shakespeare could have made the transformation more plausible if he had split the salient third scene of the third act in two, with a time interval between, a period of brooding on Iago's insinuations, a process of "soaking in." The play would be more natural if part of the transformation had taken place "behind the scenes"—so many things can occur behind the scenes, as Shakespeare himself showed in his later play, *The Winter's Tale*, where he allows a lapse of sixteen years between acts three and four and the many changes possible in sixteen years.

Shakespeare, however, chose to put the whole process of Othello's transformation into one scene and before the eyes of the audience. This time the showman's flaw in art seems to be due less to Shakespeare's habitual haste than to a proud virtuosity. At the height of his creative genius he seems to have preferred to show the audience the whole process in full view—like the prestidigitator who rolls up his sleeve to show his audience that he is concealing nothing. The flaw in *Othello* seems due less to Shakespeare's characteristic valiant carelessness than to a less characteristic over-confidence.

The fundamental difficulty lies in the conditions of the stage in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period, the omnibus character of the stage which undertook to accommodate any sort of story, even a story which, by modern standards, calls for analytical, novelistic, treatment rather than swift summary dramatic treatment—in this and in the Elizabethan-Jacobean habit of telling a whole story, not merely the culmination, as was the practice on the Greek stage. Shakespeare the showman saw theatrical opportunity in Cinthio's story of "Desdemona" and the "Moor" and the "Ancient," and Shakespeare, the dramatic artist, set to work to make the flimsy Italian tale as plausible as he could. He only half succeeded.

Sometimes Shakespeare the showman adopted without hesitation or scrutiny the primitive technique of the miracle and morality plays¹ (one source of Elizabethan drama, the other source being pretty much the whole flood of literature, ancient and modern, which the continental Renaissance brought to England). In the naïf manner of the miracle plays and moralities, Shakespeare repeatedly brought a character to the front of the stage in a communicative soliloquy in which he told the audience what to expect, as *Richard the Third* opens with a soliloquy, or monologue, in which Richard identifies himself as "a villian" as frankly as ever Judas or The Vice introduced himself to the audience in a morality play. Shakespeare never entirely dropped the primitive technique, though it is certainly pushing external criticism to unlicensed limits to assert that the soliloquies of Hamlet betray the same technique. Hamlet is emphatically not talking to the audience in his soliloquies. He is merely breathing aloud his inner doubts and agonies. He is revealing himself, not forecasting coming events. Only two of the five soliloquies give the audience information about events, and the informational forecast in one of these is only half fulfilled by subsequent occurrences, while it is the belief of many of us, not all, that the information in the other soliloquy misleads rather than apprises the audience of the real facts of the situation. When Hamlet has concluded one of his soliloquies the audience is more mystified than enlightened, is enlightened only with increasing awareness that Hamlet himself is hopelessly mystified about himself and the future, here and hereafter. Almost as perplexing are Macbeth's soliloquies except in so far as they acquaint the audience with the tumult of Macbeth's passion.

It is interesting that after Ibsen had apparently put an end

¹Cf. Schücking and Stoll, *passim*. Both emphasize this point.

to soliloquy as an artificial, antiquated stage device, the soliloquy has come back into recent drama in such a flood of usage that Mr. Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* must be nearly a third in the form of soliloquy and aside—"aside" being first cousin to soliloquy.

To repeat, Shakespeare never altogether abandoned the expository method of acquainting his audience with the situation. In what is probably his last play, *The Tempest*,¹ the second scene of the first act is merely a modified soliloquy of the informative type. It was a difficult scene to manage even with the license of Shakespeare's age and stage to use narrative exposition at greater length than is permissible in modern drama. Shakespeare did his best, but his best is not very good, considered as natural drama. He tried to make dialogue out of the interminable narrative, but Miranda's share in the dialogue is little more than conventional interruption of her father's long-spun story. Prospero is talking to the audience, not to his daughter. It is primitive technique only a little advanced beyond the communicative monologue of the early forms of English drama.

Schücking² and Stoll³ are correct in their assertion that Shakespeare employed the self-descriptive or self-explanatory method in making characters known to the audience. Stoll refers to "the Elizabethan self-descriptive or apparently self-conscious method . . . whereby tragic characters in passion speak of it as if it were an external fever."⁴ Doctor Stoll, at his worst, pushes sound criticism to a length unwarranted by the Shakespearean text, but he is right in his assertion that Miranda (in *The Tempest*) illustrates the

¹*Henry the Eighth*, which was written after *The Tempest*, is only in part by Shakespeare.

²*Character Problems*, Chap. I.

³*Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 104 ff. and passim.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 103.

point when she, an "Arcadian child of nature, to whom sin or temptation is unknown . . . calls to witness her own 'modesty' and 'innocence.'"¹ The proponent of Shakespeare's "inerrancy" may cite, in rebuttal, the fact that Miranda has been made aware of evil by Caliban's frustrated attempt to ravish her.² But Shakespeare has not "knit in" this experience with Miranda's mental processes. When she is with Ferdinand there are no *arrière-pensées*, no recollections of Caliban's assault. She is simply a pretty incident in a fantastic idyll. As there is nobody else present to tell Ferdinand how "modest," and "innocent" she is, Shakespeare must make her tell it, according to a well-established stage convention of the time. Her "hence, bashful, cunning!" is even worse, because more self-conscious, than the phrases cited by Doctor Stoll.

The fact is this whole Scene 1 of Act III of *The Tempest* is tiresome because it is mere pastoral, conventional dialogue. The wooing of Ferdinand and Miranda has in it none of the zest and warmth and sparkling humor of the wooing scenes in *As You Like It*; none of the suffocating anxiety of Portia when she watches with bated breath Bassanio meditating on the three caskets, hesitating which to choose, when Portia knows that her heart's satisfaction and her life's destiny hang in the balance, yet is by honor prevented from prompting Bassanio to the right choice, and when the agony of the suspense is over, and she sees that Bassanio is about to open the right casket, she is almost overwhelmed with joy and whispers to herself:

O love,
Be moderate; allay thy ecstasy;
In measure rein thy joy; scant this excess!
I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,
For fear I surfeit.³

¹Ibid., p. 104.

²*The Tempest*, Act I, sc. 2, lines 347-348.

³*Merchant of Venice*, Act. III, sc. 2, lines 111-115.

Portia and Rosalind are women in the clutch of holy emotion. But Miranda, for all the praises showered on her by critics and poets, is shadowy, unsubstantial. It was natural for Shelley to be fascinated by Miranda. She is of a kind with the fleshless etherealized quintessentials that Shelley put into his own poetry in place of actual people (Shelley's greatness is not in character-drawing). It is the magic, the poetry, the very remoteness from actuality which give the charm to *The Tempest*, not the solid "humans" which Shakespeare drew for plays nearer to earth and its realities. In many of the more substantial plays Shakespeare used, when he found it convenient, the prevailing Elizabethan, self-descriptive method; but he offset this with natural self-revelations as in the case of Portia, a completely humanized and individualized reaction in a story based upon an initial absurdity. Among the greatest of Shakespeare's abilities as a delineator of character was his ability to fit credible human beings to incredible situations, often to make it appear inevitable that what his people do is what they would do if such people could exist in such circumstances. In his last plays, however, made according to the Fletcherian artificial formula, Shakespeare permits more improbability of conduct than he had permitted in his tragedies, his histories, or his romantic comedies after the first flights in *Love's Labor's Lost* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Everything "went" on the Elizabethan stage, and hard-ridden Shakespeare sometimes used the methods of an artist and sometimes the methods of a showman.

As a showman Shakespeare employed most of the well-worn stage tricks of his time, such as dressing up girls as boys and assuming that even their lovers and their fathers would be unable to penetrate the disguise. These lines are written in a Colorado city where the streets are filled with

young women, tourists and mountain "hikers," dressed as boys, but the most casual observer is not deceived about their sex. Yet Proteus and Bassanio and Gratiano and Orlando never suspect that the pretty boys they are talking with are their sweethearts, and Cymbeline and Posthumus are equally deceived about the "boy" Fidele in whom Cymbeline fails to recognize his daughter and Posthumus fails to recognize his lady love, Imogen. Viola's disguise even succeeds in so deceiving another woman that Olivia, otherwise a sensible woman, falls precipitately in love with the "boy."

A stage trick repeated by Shakespeare *ad nauseam* is to have country louts use words in a sense opposite to their correct meaning with almost scientific precision of inaccuracy. It is noticeable that in his last employment of the old "gag," the "clown" (country fellow) in *The Winter's Tale*,¹ the use is meager and the humor is languid as if Shakespeare had grown weary of the thread-bare device.

Sometimes the fidelity to his central conception slipped, apparently simply because Shakespeare, consciously or unconsciously, permitted himself the license of romance in an art form that had not developed realism systematically,² sometimes substituting for *mot de caractère* the *mot d'auteur*, his own thoughts instead of his character's thoughts.

There are in his work many examples of this flaw (a flaw from the point of view of realistic criticism), many phrases that are obviously out of character with the people that utter them.

For instance, there is the exquisite antiphonal threnody sung by Guiderius and Arviragus over Fidele in *Cymbeline*,³

¹Act IV, sc. 4, lines 189-190.

²Schücking refers frequently and aptly to Shakespeare's "limited realism."

³Act IV, sc. 2.

that "lyrical dirge," which Sidney Lee says "for perfect sureness of thought and expression has no parallel in the songs of previous years."¹ But the "sureness of thought" is Shakespeare's, not the boys' who sing the dirge. They were stolen from court when one of them was three years old, the other in swaddling clothes, and reared in the mountain wilderness of Wales, far removed from contact with civilization and its disappointments. When they are mourning the (supposedly) dead Fidele, and bethinking them of the release which death brings from life's misfortunes it is natural enough that they should enumerate the perils of an exposed life in the wilderness, natural enough that they should console themselves for Fidele's untimely death with the thought that Fidele has forever escaped the terrors and perils of "lightning flash," "all dreaded thunder-stone," "heat o' the sun," "furious winter's rages," and (in Wales, where the supernatural is natural) "witchcraft charm," "ghost unlaid." These things are in character with the boys and their limited experiences in wild places. But what can they know about "frown o' the great," "tyrant's stroke," "sceptre," "learning?" What do they know about "chimney sweepers?" These latter phrases are Shakespeare's, city dweller, observer of the arrogance of those who are "dressed in a little brief authority." Indiscriminately the poet mingles what is natural to him with what is natural to the wildling boys.

There are similar false notes of character detail in Hamlet's great soliloquy, the greatest of them all, that in the first scene of the third act, when the Prince, enumerating "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," specifies (among others) "the proud man's contumely" and "the insolence of office." These are things the Prince had not experienced.

¹*Life*, 423.

True, they can be defended on the ground that Hamlet is a sympathetic observer of life and may conceivably, in his meditation on the vanity of life, instance sorrows which he had observed rather than shared. But instead of trying to square everything in Shakespeare with a pre-conception of Shakespeare's inerrancy, it is better to accept such things as expressions of the poet himself rather than of Hamlet, of the poet who, perhaps speaking in his own person, in sonnet 66, had complained of life's inequalities, specifying "gilded honor shamefully misplaced," "strength by limping sway disabled," "art made tongue-tied by authority," "folly, doctor-like controlling skill," "simple truth miscalled simplicity," and "captive good attending captain ill."

Schücking¹ confirms the long-ago impression of the present writer that Mercutio's speech about Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet* is "out of character," is Shakespeare's own exuberant, poetic fancy, carried over from *Midsummer Night's Dream* into a character of solid flesh-and-blood, and "resembles," says Schücking, "an operatic air inserted for the sake of the music without regard to the characterization." It is beautiful poetry but it does not harmonize with Mercutio's blunt character and forthright speech.

Shakespeare criticism can never go straight if it ignores the principle laid down in Ibsen's simple phrase, "We are no longer living in Shakespeare's time," which time permitted liberties and discrepancies unallowable in a more realistic age and on a more realistic stage than Shakespeare's.

He got his effects, not only as a showman but as a romantic showman on a romantic stage where nearly anything was permissible that could seize and hold the attention of an audience but little tutored in the demand for verisimilitude.

¹ *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, pp. 97-99.

Examples and varieties of showman's tricks and romancer's artifices could be multiplied into a book. This is an obvious side of Shakespeare's work which cannot be overlooked without emasculating his product or distorting it to fit standards of plausibility mandatory in our day, but often in his day more honored in the breach than in the observance.

V

THE ARTIST

THERE is, however, another side, more delicate but equally unmistakable, the artist side, by overlooking which we miss much that has made Shakespeare's plays what they are, which separates them from most of the plays written by his contemporaries and immediate followers, which tempers theatricality not only with valiant poetry (like Chapman's), exquisite poetry (like Fletcher's and like Jonson's when Jonson was in his lyric mood), but also with a dramatic tact which puts them in a class by themselves. Sometimes a simple realism as affecting as Thomas Heywood's (and mingled with much more poetic imagination than Heywood possessed), sometimes with penetrating flashes of character insight, in which perhaps only John Webster approached him, but which in Webster's meagre, surviving work are few compared with the prodigality of such flashes in Shakespeare's voluminous work.

There is, for instance, an instinctive realism amid his romantic rapture. Professor Schelling exaggerates nothing when he says: "That Shakespeare should have been the most successful writer of chronicle plays was in the nature of things, because he was the truest realist of his age."¹

Space is lacking to dwell upon the realism and (with some lapses) the consistency of the character drawing in the historical plays. Recently a specialist in English History

¹*Elizabethan Drama*, by Felix E. Schelling, London, Dent; New York, E. P. Dutton, 1914, vol. I, p. 307.

glowed when the conversation turned to *Richard the Second*, and he said: "None of the latest and most scientific research has broken or can break the fidelity to the main truth of Richard's character as revealed by Shakespeare." If *Richard the Third* is a libel on Richard's character, as some modern historians say, it is only fair to remember that Shakespeare painted Richard no blacker than he appeared in the pages of Holinshed and More from which Shakespeare took his material. Even when Shakespeare deliberately violates history to secure dramatic effect, as in the alteration of Hotspur's age, he keeps realistic faith with his dramatic conception.

The actual Hotspur was considerably older at the battle of Shrewsbury than Shakespeare represents him. But Shakespeare's Hotspur is very nearly if not quite consistent with himself as conceived by Shakespeare for dramatic purposes: his virtues and his faults, his success and his failure, growing out of one root and stem; the gallant, fiery warrior so impassioned with personal "honor" that he has neither time nor patience to cultivate the qualities of an effective leader, a superb knight errant but a blundering commander, a dauntless fighter but a failure as diplomat and ally.

If space permitted it would be a pleasant task to enumerate the many striking figures of soldiers and statesmen in these comprehensive, historical plays, *men*, who at first reading or fiftieth reading expose the wayward fallacy of Frank Harris that Shakespeare could not draw men of action. If Shakespeare could not, who could?

Professor Schelling says that in the historical plays Shakespeare gave such "reflections of contemporary life and manners" (meaning contemporary with Shakespeare's own life) as to make the historical plays "a veritable mirror of life."¹

¹ *Elizabethan Drama*, introduction, p. xxix.

The tavern and inn stables become as pungent and "atmospheric" in *King Henry the Fourth* as they are in the pages of Dickens; and Fielding could not make a country squire and his premises more real than Shakespeare has made them in the scenes in Gloucestershire on Justice Shallow's estate in *Second Henry the Fourth*.

Only master genius could paint such big panoramas with so many little details of convincing reality.

Of scores of little "touches" consider one of the least significant, the delightful, little, fourth scene of the third act of *Henry the Fifth*, an interlude amid scenes of broil and battle, wherein the Princess Katharine is taking a lesson in English from her maid Alice (and, by the way, what about the comparative intelligence of Elizabethan and modern audiences? How large a portion of popular English or American audience today would sit through a dialogue in French?). Alice's English is sparse, but more than her mistress's, and Alice is a good teacher, up to her ability, for she has the Princess reiterate the few English words which she is learning in this primary lesson. When the Princess asks Alice for the English equivalent of "les doigts," Alice scratches her head (or whatever is the feminine substitute for the masculine gesture of puzzlement) and says: "Les doigts? ma foi, j'oublie les doigts; mais je me souviendrai. Les doigts? je pense qu'ils sont appelés de fingres; oui, de fingres."

Could dialogue go beyond that for sheer naturalness? Alice has forgotten the word "fingers," but after hesitation recalls it. A perfect little "natural" touch. And the sureness of Shakespeare's art is in the fact that the little device for laughter is not repeated. Being a trickster, he might, one would think, repeat the "catch." But he does not. He is artist as well as showman in this scene. Alice remembers the

other English words for which the Princess asks. Adroitly Shakespeare varies Katharine's mistakes in trying to remember "elbow." Once it is "bilbow," then it is "ilbow," as the Princess repeats her lesson. And then the little touch of flattery from Alice when she tells her mistress: "Vous prononcez les mots aussi droit que les natifs d'Angleterre." Katharine cannot quite accept the compliment at face value, but she hopes "by God's grace" ("par la grace de Dieu") that she may in a little while learn English—as many another student of a foreign language has hoped to overcome difficulties, "by God's grace."

When the Princess with her little English is wooed by bluff King Harry with his less French¹ there is a scene of high comedy worthy of the author of the greatest low comedy that was ever written, the Falstaff scenes. Having vainly tried to understand Katharine's French, the royal martial wooer asks: "But, Kate, dost thou understand thus much English, canst thou love me?" Either because the Princess has had more lessons from Alice in the interim or because Harry's question is universally understood by women, Katharine replies: "I cannot tell," and the hero of Agincourt comes back with a question as characteristic, as direct, bluff and humorous, as anything he ever said when he was the madcap companion of Falstaff: "Can any of your neighbors tell, Kate?"

In alternate use of romantic improbability and realistic verisimilitude, Shakespeare proceeded on the principle of the modern "free elective system," and followed his momentary inclination. Two instances in *Hamlet* must stand for many that might be cited by way of illustration. In the first act Horatio has come from the university to attend the funeral of the elder King Hamlet and condole with his uni-

¹Act V, sc. 2.

versity friend, young Prince Hamlet, but he goes out on the battlements with the soldiers to watch for the ghost before making known to his friend his presence at Elsinore. It would have been easy to explain this unlikelihood: Horatio might have arrived at night and refrained from disturbing the Prince; or finding that he is too late for the funeral and hearing of the shocking speed with which the royal widow, Hamlet's mother, has remarried, he might have hesitated from embarrassment to intrude upon his friend's sorrow and chagrin—such conduct would have been in keeping with the character and general deportment of Horatio. But Shakespeare makes no explanation. What Ibsen would have had to explain on a realistic stage Shakespeare leaves without explication on a romantic stage.

On the other hand, there is a bit of nice realism in the second scene of the fifth act. Hamlet is telling Horatio how he forged a letter purporting to be from the King of Denmark to the King of England authorizing the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and when Horatio asks him how he made such a serious document appear official, Hamlet replies that he happened to have with him the signet ring of his father, the former King, which ring "was the model of that Danish seal," and with that stamped the commission. Presidents of the United States sometimes wear rings or scarf pins which are miniatures of the official seal—a "modern instance" in illustration of the plausibility of Shakespeare's device.

Speaking of rings, which, next to letters, are the most employed material objects on which Shakespeare hinges his dramatic incident, there is the dexterous episode in *Twelfth Night*¹ of the ring sent by the infatuated Olivia as a token of love to Viola disguised as a boy, sent by the fatuous

¹Act. II, sc. 2.

Malvolio who with pompous amplifications transmits the message of his mistress. Viola is bewildered a moment, then, with woman's intuition, senses the situation: Olivia has fallen in love with her, thinking her a boy. Viola has no reason to like Olivia (for Viola is in love with the man who is wooing Olivia), but there is such a thing as sex loyalty, and Viola will not betray to a mere man Olivia's mistake and humiliation, and so she flashes back her splendid lie: "She took the ring of me, I'll none of it." One recalls old Doctor H. H. Furness, Nestor of Shakespearean commentators, waxing eloquent over this and saying (what is true) that none of Shakespeare's contemporaries could have done that episode.

When time and circumstance permitted, Shakespeare modulated his poetic diction and cadences to fit the characters and the situations. There are too many varieties of poetry in Shakespeare's pages to be catalogued here, but in illustration of his poetic tact (as "sure" as his dramatic tact) there may be cited poetry in the grand style as it appears in some of Othello's great, incremental speeches, massive poetry to fit a massive personality. Then there is the vaulting, impassioned poetry of many of Macbeth's speeches, where the verses boil and swirl like a whirlpool, and metaphor leaps out of metaphor, simile out of simile, until the mind is exhausted by the prodigality and is scarcely able to follow the swift changes of thought, passion and imagery—excited poetry to suit the excited mind of Macbeth, hovering on the verge of hallucination and delirium. Perhaps nowhere in English poetry is there anything to match it except in some of the lyrics and odes of Shelley.

And a third type of poetry (among many other types) is as well illustrated in *Coriolanus* as anywhere else, where the arrogance of Coriolanus is frequently tempered by Roman restraint (Shakespeare's perception of Roman

dignity was almost clairvoyant) and there results a matchless simplicity of diction and directness. This last tragedy which he wrote is one of his greatest, though too austere to be as popular as its predecessors. Shakespeare would seem to have written it more to please himself than the populace, constructed a technical masterpiece as skillful as *Othello*, and seldom lapsed into the rhodomontade, which was one of his besetting temptations. The conclusion of the second scene of the third act is poignant in its simplicity, when against his inclination Coriolanus finally yields to the persuasions of his mother (one of the greatest of Shakespeare's great women) and consents to return to the forum and placate the angry mob:

Pray be content.

Mother, I am going to the market-place;

Chide me no more

. Look, I am going;

Commend me to my wife. I'll return consul.

And the great Volumnia, aware that she has won a victory over her son's will at the cost of what he and she prize most dearly, their patrician pride, says briefly: "Do your will." And the two loyal men friends urge him when in the market-place "to answer mildly;" "Well, mildly be it then. Mildly," says Coriolanus. And the scene ends.

But in the market-place he is not permitted to be mild. The wily, slimy tribunes sting him back to his old fury. If there were justice in public affairs these designing demagogues would be banished from Rome along with Coriolanus. So, prodded to a fresh outbreak of arrogance, Coriolanus vents his scorn upon the Roman populace in a rhetorical outburst which is the most famous speech in the play, but far from the most artistic, and he is banished. There follows¹ the parting at the gates of Rome of Corio-

¹ Act IV, sc. 1.

lanus with his mother, wife, and friends, a scene of restrained dignity, of sorrow too deep for agitation, of simplest and most natural language from Coriolanus. His mother has shed prudence and rails against the rabble that banished her son, but he maintains his recovered stoicism, and seeks to calm his mother, cheer his wife, and put heart into his crushed friends—a speech too long for quotation, but containing the incomparable admonition to his old general:

Tell these sad women [his wife and mother]
'Tis fond [foolish] to wail inevitable strokes.

"Tell these sad women." It is like Antony after the defeat at Actium: "Call to me all my sad captains."

Which leads to citation of just a few of many memorable brevities of speech in which with equal poetic and dramatic tact Shakespeare summed up a situation or revealed a character: old Lear, his passion spent, bending over his dead daughter, whom he tries to believe not dead: "Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little." Or Hamlet, "The rest is silence." Or Cleopatra, after her rich, oriental lamentation over her dead Antony, saying simply:

We'll bury him; and then what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion.

Or Brutus facing the ghost of Caesar and hearing that on the morrow he must fight not only with the armies of the triumvirate but also with destiny itself in the image of the murdered Caesar, whose ghost has grimly told Brutus that he will see him "at Philippi," "Why, I will see thee at Philippi, then." Or Laertes, when his crazed sister has left the room: "Do you see this, O God?" Or Ulysses, after he and Troilus have been eyewitnesses to the infidelity of Cressida, turning to the stricken lad and saying with equal sympathy, simplicity and finality: "All's done, my lord." And the crushed, bewildered Troilus, struggling to disbelieve

the testimony of his own eyes and the brief assurances of Ulysses that the wanton they have just seen was really Cressida, crying out:

Let it not be believed for womanhood!
Think, we had mothers.

Or Desdemona, after Othello's brutal accusations of her, and his exit, making answer to her maid Emilia's excited inquiry ("How do you, madam? How do you, my good lady?") in the simple words "Faith, half asleep." Or Ophelia (when the frantic Hamlet tells her "I loved you not") "I was the more deceived." Or the old general Siward (in *Macbeth*) hearing that his son is dead and having ascertained that his wounds were "on the front," "Why, then, God's soldier be he?" Or Juliet, waking from the sleeping potion in the ghastly tomb to see Friar Laurence bending over her: "O comfortable friar!" Or broken Shylock asking permission to leave the courtroom: "I am not well." Or Richard the Second answering Northumberland's demands that he read (and presumably sign) the bill of particulars, the charges on which he is being deposed:

Must I do so? And must I ravel out
My weaved-up folly?

Or generous Harry of Monmouth having slain Harry Percy in combat standing over the dying Hotspur with silent commiseration and completing the sentence which death stopped in the throat of the conquered foe, Hotspur gasping:

No Percy thou art dust
And food for —

and the magnanimous victor ends the sentence:

For worms, brave Percy: fare thee well, great heart!

Not all these citations are in the same class, and some are taken out of the context, are parts of longer speeches. But

they illustrate the point, Shakespeare's skill in condensing into simplest phrases the summation of a tragic situation or a tragic conclusion. He whose facile power over language frequently led him into verbosity and bombast could, at a critical moment, be singularly brief and utterly effective.

And this leads to Shakespeare's use of silence, a topic long dear to this writer and but recently written about by Professor Alwin Thaler in his book *Shakespeare's Silences*. One of the most effective examples of silence in drama is Lady Macbeth's silence after the tumultuous banquet where the ghost of Banquo appeared before the distracted Macbeth. She has used all her force and tact to keep her distraught husband from betraying his guilt, has at last dismissed the banqueters, and she and her husband are alone. One might expect a torrent of reproach and abuse from Lady Macbeth (earlier in the play she had shown rich resourcefulness of speech in upbraiding and goading-on her hesitating husband), but now Lady Macbeth says nothing. She is exhausted by the ordeal through which she has passed as a buffer between her frantic husband and the excited guests. But there is more to it than that. What is there to say? Blood-boltered criminals that they are, what is there to say? Silence is more dramatic here than any speech, even any speech that Shakespeare, master of language, might have written.

This writer has long meditated a book on Shakespeare's minor or subordinate characters. Maybe he will write it some day. If so he will devote detailed attention to many characters who are usually abominably acted on the modern stage under the vicious "star" system, because the characters say and do so little that they are usually committed to supernumeraries, actors of too low a grade of intelligence to perceive the possibilities in these lesser rôles. Among many

of these, three must answer now for illustration: the Doctor in *Macbeth*, Claudius in *Hamlet*, and Emilia in *Othello*.

The Doctor speaks only about two hundred and forty words in the great sleep-walking scene, but he who reads often and sympathetically this scene knows this Doctor as well as he knows his own physician professionally and personally.

This Doctor is not a young man. The Waiting-Gentlewoman with whom he talks is young, with the self-complacency of youth, the smug satisfaction in her virtue that has not yet been tried in the furnace of experience. The contrast between the Waiting-Gentlewoman's cool self-felicitation that she is not in the conscience-plight of Lady Macbeth, her mistress, her canny care for "number one" (she will tell nothing to the Doctor that might get herself into trouble) are strikingly different from the Doctor's forgetfulness of self, his solicitude for his patient, his human sympathy. He who has witnessed so much misery in the pursuit of his profession has no inclination to plume himself on his personal escape from misery. At first he is all doctor, then all astonished, sympathetic, comprehending, human being, then all doctor again—and all in two hundred and forty words.

He plies the maid with questions about the symptoms of the Queen. He ponders the report which he receives from the maid, he regards the condition as serious. Then he asks for more symptoms. Has the Queen talked, and if so what did she say? The maid refuses to answer that question—she is not going to say anything that might get her into trouble. The Doctor tries to reassure her. What is said to a physician is held in sacred confidence and he tells the maid it is her duty to report the facts to him.

The brief colloquy is interrupted by the entrance of the Queen. The Doctor scrutinizes her closely, asks questions

about the light which the Queen carries, her gestures, and so forth. Then he listens intently as the somnambulist Queen begins to talk. The Queen refers to Macduff's wife who had disappeared so strangely, to this and other things. The Doctor, with a physician's protective instinct, tells the maid she has been hearing things she should not have heard. As the Queen proceeds, the Doctor begins to understand—and, understanding, he realizes what many a physician must at times realize, that he is at the limit of his science. The Queen is sick in mind, not body: "This disease is beyond my practice," says the Doctor. He is the disarmed man of science now, just the anxious, helpless, sympathetic, human being. Then the Queen says something about Banquo and his grave. "Even so?" mutters the Doctor to himself. So *that's* what became of Banquo! As the great scene draws toward an end the Doctor realizes that if there is any hope for this woman it must be in spiritual not medical care—"More needs she the divine than the physician." Evidently she is a murderess or at least *particeps criminis*, but she is a woman, a tortured woman. And his experience has taught him pity for suffering, whatever the cause. "May God forgive her," he starts to say, but he does not say it. The best of us—what are we? "God, God forgive—*us all!*" says this human-hearted man. The moment after the Queen's departure from the room he is all physician again, giving orders to the maid. At least the Queen must be protected from committing suicide—a wise precaution in view of the event, for though Shakespeare leaves us in some doubt concerning the cause of Lady Macbeth's death (also of Ophelia's death), there is a strong presumption of suicide. Now the Doctor knows what ails his patient, but his diagnosis is futile, for he can neither cure the disease nor make known to others its cause—"I think but dare not speak."

And it is all done in two hundred and forty words.. A frugal word-economist, this Shakespeare—when he chose to be.

Some years prior to the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, 1916, world preparation was afoot for a world memorialization of the event. But a world war intervened and the ceremonials were truncated. However, some universities, societies, and individuals paused in their war activities to observe the occasion, and out of the observations there came a few notable publications, for instance, the collection of Columbia University essays issued under the title *Shaksperian Studies*, and the memorable address by the all-too-reticent Professor George Lyman Kittredge, entitled *Shakspeare*.¹

Professor Kittredge dwelt at some length upon the character of King Claudius in *Hamlet*, as Professor George Saintsbury had previously done in his chapter on Shakespeare in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. Both scholars called attention to the care with which Shakespeare had worked out this character. But before these scholar-critics had spoken, many attentive students of *Hamlet* must have been struck by the superfluous workmanship expended upon Claudius—superfluous to theatrical necessity.

For the plot, all that was necessary was to make Claudius a villain—an adulterer and murderer. Nothing else in Claudius is needed to forward the story. Claudius steals the heart and flesh of the wife of his brother, the reigning king, murders the king, usurps the throne, marries the widow, and, when he discovers that his guilt is suspected by his nephew-step-son, arranges secretly to have Hamlet killed. As pretty a piece of villainy as could have been invented by Shakespeare's melodramatic contemporary Massinger, as was ever presented on the stage of the old London theatre

¹Harvard University Press, 1916.

in the Bowery, as can be seen today on the motion picture screen. A villain who leaves nothing to be desired either in wickedness or retribution, this Claudius.

Though a more substantial rôle than that of the Doctor in *Macbeth*, it would seem (judging from stage performances of the play) that Claudius is another character uninviting to actors of talent. He is seldom if ever adequately cast. The actors who enact him are either pallid supernumeraries or men who see only the scoundrel's outstanding qualities, nothing of Shakespeare's artistic shadings in drawing him.

These shadings are artistic, not moral. In drawing Claudius, Shakespeare shifted not an inch his strict boundary line between good and evil. Claudius is a rascal, and richly deserves the death he gets from Hamlet's sword. Shakespeare leaves us in no doubt about that. The only pity is that Hamlet did not kill him sooner. Hell was waiting for Claudius, and if Hamlet had sent him thither sooner, he would have saved the lives of seven other people, including his own and that of poor, helpless, futile Ophelia. But, of course, if Hamlet had killed Claudius sooner there would have been no play, or at least a play quite different in plot from that which is.

Yet without palliating the wickedness of Claudius, without rousing a shadow of pity for his violent execution, Shakespeare created a complex human being, not a monster. Gilbert and Sullivan in their delightful, tuneful fooling called attention to the possibility that a burglar when not a-burgling may be a rather pleasant person. Shakespeare by the cunning and the care of his art of characterization showed in Claudius what every prison warden knows, what every reader of newspapers knows, that criminals are sometimes brave men and sometimes even possess genial traits.

These facts do not alter, and should not alter, the law's

firm dealing with them. They are tried, condemned and executed, not for the latent good that is in them, but for the blatant evil which led them to endanger the security of society. The criminal code cannot be as subtle as human nature. Judicial procedure cannot be as flexible as artistic justice.

In Shakespeare's handling of rascals there is no hint of the contemporary sentimentalism which has been summed up in the phrase "To know all is to forgive all." Shakespeare forgives nothing. He merely presents the human fact. When that complex and fluent fact comes into conflict with rigid law, the logic of his plays indicates that he was on the side of the law.

But that does not alter the fact itself, or the human observations and artistic practice of Shakespeare. Human nature is a complicated piece of machinery, and even a Claudius may possess amiable qualities. As a showman Shakespeare did not have to shade his portrait with these amiabilities. But as an artist he must, for, as George Saintsbury says, speaking of this same Claudius: "At this time of his career [when he was writing his great tragedies] he simply could not 'scamp' his work in the direction of character any more than in the direction of poetry. Others might throw in 'supers' to fill up a play—he would not." And Saintsbury adds that Claudius "is a villain but he is a man."¹

Claudius illustrates a slight error in Doctor Stoll's usually straight thinking, namely that a Shakespearean character may be judged by what other characters in the play say of him.² This is true with reservations. A Shakespearean character is to be understood, in part, by what he himself says

¹*Cambridge History of English Literature* (British edition), vol. V, pp. 200, 202.

²Doctor Stoll emphasizes this in his essay on Shylock; but see also essay on "The Characterization," *Shakespeare Studies*, p. 140: "The comment of others is one of Shakespeare's chief means of characterization."

—and does. What Prince Hamlet and the ghost of his murdered father and the faithful Horatio say about Claudius is true and just, as far as it goes, but it does not go the full length of the personality of Claudius.

These three know Claudius better than others in the play know him, not excepting the Queen, his wife. For it is apparent that Shakespeare intended his auditors to understand that, though Queen Gertrude has been an adulteress and though she married her paramour with indecent haste after the death of her first husband, she had no suspicion that a murder had been committed until her son informed her of the fact, and even after that shocking enlightenment, she behaved as if she were not altogether sure that her distracted son knew what he was talking about. Either that, or else Shakespeare when he rewrote his play in the form in which it appeared in the second quarto, failed to make the Queen's behavior self-consistent after the stormy interview with her son in her boudoir.

What the ghost and Prince Hamlet say about the scoundrelism of Claudius is sufficiently denunciatory and tempestuous to satisfy the virtue of any audience, Elizabethan or modern, and to gratify the most whole-hearted hatred of evil and evil doers. And all they say is deserved. But what they say is a verdict, not a portrait.

The portrait is furnished by Claudius himself, in his contacts with other people, in his conversations and his meditations.

In the verdict and in the fate which justly overtakes Claudius there is the hand of Shakespeare the playwright; in the portrait there is the hand of Shakespeare the artist. The two aspects are entirely consistent with each other. But the portrait is deeper, wider, more human, more faithful to the actualities of this sad world, in short, more artistic.

In some phases of him this Claudius is "a good fellow." Many "a good fellow" has landed in jail, and some on the gallows and in the electric chair. And where they ended was their deserved destination. It is virtue, not good fellowship, which saves people from ruin.

Claudius has a genial liking for people—so long as they do not get in the way of his ambitious projects—a trait of some politicians who are innocent of the criminal tendencies of Claudius. He has a pleasant way with young people (with Laertes, for instance, in the first act of the play); kindly consideration for old people (Polonius, for instance, until Claudius grows impatient with the doddering blunders of the fatuous, old Lord Chamberlain); commiseration for suffering innocence (he is gentle with poor, crazed Ophelia and is sorrow-stricken by her condition even amid his anxiety concerning the perils that are thickening around him); a genuine affection for his wife's son (until he realizes that Hamlet knows his guilty secret, Claudius heartily desires to keep the young man at court, both for Hamlet's mother's sake and because Claudius has a personal liking for the Prince—a regard which is emphatically not reciprocated). He is devoted to the wife whom he has won by such foul means; this is evident throughout the play, and in several places made explicit, as when Claudius explains to Laertes, as one confessing a weakness, that the Queen's love for Hamlet has prevented him from dealing with a dangerous enemy as one in his authoritative position might, that it is his "virtue" or his "plague" to be so much in love with his wife that he cannot live without her, and therefore dares do nothing openly which might alienate her affections from himself; and again in the climax of that line, noted by Professor Kittredge, wherein, communing with himself, Claudius states to himself why he cannot truly repent by bringing

forth fruit meet for repentance, cannot, even to save his soul from eternal torment give up the things which his crime has won for him:

My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.

He has that which Shakespeare's cooler rascals, such as Iago and Edmund, usually have, ability to assess himself without illusion; they deceive everybody except themselves—do these clear-headed scoundrels, Iago, Edmund and Claudius. Claudius has one thing which Iago and Edmund have not, a conscience, enough conscience to distinguish clearly between remorse and repentance.

That spectacle¹ of Claudius trying to pray, and unable to pray because he knows that prayer is for those who obey or are truly penitent after they have disobeyed, and because he knows that his own spiritual condition is only remorse, that spectacle is one of the many stupendous "sermons" which slipped into the lines of this play-actor who never "preached" anything deliberately, but who had a gift of "seeing true" which made him a mentor who intended only to be a caterer of amusement. It is no gowned and surpliced doctor of divinity, but the stricken, scarlet sinner Claudius who utters that truth beyond which truth cannot go:

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, *there* the action lies
In his true nature.

And, finally, Claudius has a calm courage in the face of personal peril, quite consistent with criminality, as wardens and sheriffs who have chaperoned murderers to the gates of eternity can testify, and which enables Shakespeare to write a brief scene of unsurpassed, dramatic effectiveness.

¹Hamlet, Act. III, sc. 3.

In the fifth scene of the fourth act Laertes, back post-haste from Paris, where news has reached him that his father has been murdered, bursts into the room where Claudius and the Queen are conversing, and with drawn sword hotly demands satisfaction for his father's murder. Outside there is a mob (a typical, Shakespearean, excited, fickle, dangerous mob) clamoring for vengeance and shouting "Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!" It is a ticklish moment, and a better man than Claudius might well be cowed. The calmness of Claudius is superb. The frightened Queen leaps between her husband and the vengeance-thirsty Laertes, seizes Laertes to prevent him from killing her husband. Calmly Claudius says twice, "Let him go, Gertrude," and coolly asks Laertes why his "rebellion looks so giant-like." Furious Laertes demands "Where is my father?" Laconically, Claudius answers "Dead." Again Queen Gertrude throws herself upon Laertes to stay his avenging arm, gasping, "But not by him," and again the unperturbed Claudius admonishes her to desist: "Let him demand his fill." With hot resolution and in molten speech Laertes consigns allegiance "to hell" and swears he will "be revenged most thoroughly for my father." "Who shall stay you?" the unfaltering Claudius counters. And when Laertes swears "not all the world," Claudius quietly asks him if it is necessary to kill everybody in order to satisfy his vengeance. When Laertes, calming down a little, says he desires the death of none but him or those responsible for his father's death, this unexcited Claudius, talking as an elder to a spoiled child recovering from "tantrums," says in language worthy of Shakespeare's best: "Why, now you speak like a good child."

A little later Claudius is closeted with Laertes, working out an infamous plot, spiced with lies, against the life of

Hamlet, a conspiracy destined to sweep to violent death himself, his beloved wife and Laertes, as well as Hamlet. He is a precious villain, and he "gets what's coming to him," but he is no theatrical automaton. He is a man predominantly wicked because of his ambition and his uncontrolled love for his brother's wife (Hamlet calls it "lust," but lust lacks the constancy of Claudius' infatuation for Gertrude). He is, as Saintsbury says, "a man"; as Kittredge says, "a very great man, though an enormous malefactor."

If space were unlimited, it would be pleasant to linger over Laertes as an example, and one of the best, of Shakespeare's use of the "dramatic foil," a familiar theatrical device of setting one character over in contrast against another. The melodramatist, working only in primary colors or chiaroscuro, usually sets a villain against a paragon to make his paragon whiter. Shakespeare the artist works in "values." Laertes is quite definitely and consciously a parallelism to Hamlet. Each young man has a murdered father to avenge: says the just Hamlet of Laertes, "by the image of my cause, I see the portraiture of his," and, later, when they are about to begin the fatal fencing bout, Hamlet says, with an overtone of ironical significance, a pun with meat in it, "I'll be your foil, Laertes." The contrast and comparison is subtle and "valued." Laertes has all the resolution and quick decision which Hamlet lacks. As a man of action, he is immensely superior to Hamlet. But in intellect and in all the qualities we call "spiritual" Hamlet is, correspondingly, the superior of Laertes. The comparison and contrast are theatrical in purpose, artistic in effect.

Just one other minor character of so many (a book is needed to deal with them) must be suggested rather than analyzed, Emilia in *Othello*.

Perhaps there should be a distinction between minor

characters whose lines are few (like those of the Doctor in *Macbeth*, old Erpingham in *Henry the Fifth*, Sebastian in *The Tempest*, and so forth) and subsidiary characters whose lines are rather numerous, like Claudius and Emilia.

Be that as it may, Emilia is a striking example of the way Shakespeare combined showmanship and art. Her stealing of Desdemona's handkerchief to gratify an unexplained whim of her husband's (Iago) is theatrical claptrap, unadulterated "hokum," a bit of creaking machinery to get the plot wound up. That disposed of, Emilia becomes a person as real as any in literature, completely digested by the author's imagination and projected into the development of the play's fatality with the sure hand of an artist. If a little higher in the social scale than a servant, she is, in any event, servant-minded. She is an army girl (like Mulvaney's wife). She has knocked about military camps as the wife of a subordinate officer too long and she has seen too much to carry very heavy impedimenta of "ideals." So far as ideals are concerned, Emilia "travels light."

Her blunt language to her husband¹ carries conviction, and makes it evident that Shakespeare meant to exonerate her from Iago's pretended suspicion of her marital infidelity as a *fait accompli*, but she frankly admits, in conversation with her mistress, that she could not swear to keep her virtue in all possible contingencies. Resistance to temptation might conceivably have its limits. "The world's a huge thing" she answers when Desdemona asks her if she would yield her virtue "for all the world."² Rather coarse-grained is Emilia, her speech as frank as her nature. The word that Desdemona's tongue falters on comes from Emilia's lips without hesitation or embarrassment. She has no illusions about the

¹*Othello*, Act IV, sc. 2, lines 144-147.

²*Ibid.*, Act IV, sc. 3, lines 68-69.

difference in attitude between wooers and husbands¹—in fact, she has no illusions about men at all.

When poor bewildered Desdemona finding that her idol has feet of clay, but, still not understanding what Othello's transformation is all about, utters that exquisite line of uncomprehending resignation, "Nay, we must think men are not gods," Emilia, in her forthright way goes straight to the point, a surmise that Othello's affliction may be jealousy, and if it is that, the situation is bad, for jealous men

Are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they're jealous.

When Desdemona prays "Heaven" to keep this thing "from Othello's mind," Emilia, apparently without much faith or conviction, says, "Lady, amen."²

Emilia has been Iago's wife too long to dwell on mountain tops of spiritual exaltation. A plain woman who deals with facts, not roseate dreams. It is a pity that Shakespeare had to mar the portrait with Emilia's participation in the handkerchief episode and her incredible stupidity, if not duplicity, when Othello in Emilia's presence demands of Desdemona an explanation of the disappearance of the handkerchief.³ That is the theatrical jugglery of the plot.

For the rest, Emilia is sound and true. She has no ideals but she has what honest matter-of-fact women so often have—the thing that makes them so dangerous to tricksters—an everyday, militant passion for justice.

That devotion to justice wrecks all Iago's scheme. He who knows so much has never known about that. Maybe Emilia herself never knew about it until she was roused by a dreadful act of injustice. Some people don't know how good they are until a crisis stirs their goodness into action.

¹*Othello*, Act III, sc. 4, lines 100–103.

²*Ibid.*, lines 159–164.

³*Ibid.*, lines 55–96.

Iago, who works his will so easily upon others, never takes his wife into the reckoning. A word from him and she will be silent. But that is where Iago miscalculates. "There is a crack in everything God has made," says Emerson. Emilia's passion for justice is the crack in the scheme of things presented in *Othello*, and the crack, under the earthquake shock of ruthless murder, widens into a chasm which swallows up Iago—also Emilia herself and Othello. For, changing the metaphor, it is the cancerous proliferation of evil and its consequences which makes the Shakespearean tragedies so impressive—and so "true."

When Emilia, after much beating on the door of the chamber in which Othello has just strangled his wife,¹ is admitted and excitedly tells Othello that Roderigo has been killed by Cassio, she hears a stifled moan from the bed, tears aside the curtains and beholds her mistress dying, murdered. The dialogue which follows is too excellent to be paraphrased. In the words of John Keats about a less exalted piece of literature:

Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,
For here, in truth, it doth not well belong
To speak.

Ibsen has not surpassed it in realism and not often has Shakespeare surpassed it in poetry.

When, at last, it has penetrated Emilia's mind that her husband has instigated this murder with a false story about the stolen handkerchief, she, defying alike Othello's threats ("I care not for thy sword") and the command of Iago to hold her tongue and go home ("Perchance, Iago, I shall ne'er go home"), blurts out the story of the handkerchief as it really was, receives her death wound from Iago's sword, creeps up on the bed beside her dead mistress, and sobs out her life.

¹*Othello*, Act V, sc. 2.

Of all things, Emilia has become a heroine and a martyr. And yet there is nothing inconsistent with her character in this. When these Emilias make up their minds that justice shall be done, justice generally is done. And justice overtakes alike the defiant remorseless Iago and the wan repentant Othello, who has discovered when it is too late how he has been duped.

Emilia is the Nemesis of this play as Macduff is the Nemesis of *Macbeth*.

In dramaturgy Shakespeare has scarcely surpassed the manipulation of Macduff, as he took the story over from Holinshed's rambling chronicle. Macduff illustrates Shakespeare's skill, not only in drawing secondary characters but also in weaving them into his story with dramatic power. Holinshed does not introduce Macduff until the narrative is about two-thirds ended, and then only casually. But Shakespeare, with true eye for a dramatic stroke, brings him forward into the play, arranges for his entrance just after the murder of Duncan,¹ an integral part of the structure of the play, an instrument of Nemesis.

And what an entrance it is! Is there a more stunning stage entrance in dramatic literature? In a chamber to the left is the King of Scotland murdered, in a chamber to the right the guiltiest couple in all the kingdom are frantically attempting to cover up traces of their crime, in the middle distance is a porter babbling drunken nonsense overladen with unconscious irony; with memories of the old morality plays he imagines himself keeper of hell-gate and in stern reality he is just that, keeper of the gate of that hell which mortals prepare by their violation of the plain laws of human obligations. And on the outer gate God's messenger of

¹*Macbeth*, Act II, sc. 3.

vengeance, in person of Macduff, is thundering for admission, his mailed fist clanging on the brazen gate.

DeQuincey has meditated memorably on this scene:¹ "From my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in *Macbeth*. It was this: the knocking at the gate which succeeds to the murder of Duncan produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity. . . . At length I solved it to my own satisfaction. . . . When the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them."

However, one needed not to have read DeQuincey to get the effect when he saw the scene performed by Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett—the shock and suspense of the clamorous and insistent beating on the gate without, the entrance of Barrett as Macduff with virile step and head erect demanding of the porter in clear crisp tones:

Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,
That you do lie so late?

The normal world of health had broken in on the sick world of horror within the castle, and, moreover, one knew that the entrance of Macduff was the first casting of a

¹"On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," originally published, October, 1823, in *London Magazine*; in DeQuincey's *Collected Writings*, edited by David Masson, London, A. & C. Black, vol. X.

shadow across Macbeth's path, a forelengthened shadow of a far-off but inexorable event.

Structural dramatic art can go no further than that timed arrival and great entrance scene.

Of the ethics of it one must not speak, lest he be betrayed into doing what Shakespeare refrained from doing—preaching.

The word "psychology" has been used several times in these lectures. It is an inhibited word in some of the most intelligent recent Shakespearean criticism. The reason for the inhibition is valid: in the name of "psychology" and "philosophy" many strange and esoteric meanings have been read into the Shakespearean dramas; the revulsion to "external" criticism is healthy. But as has been remarked before in these pages, there is so much in the Shakespearean drama which resembles psychology that it might just as well be called psychology.

With one example out of scores, illustrating a double impression from some of Shakespeare's lines, a theatrical obvious meaning and a subtle under-significance, this bit of writing on Shakespeare as showman and artist must conclude.

In the sixth scene of the fourth act of *King Lear* the old King is a raving maniac, and that is the showman's impression which Shakespeare wished to convey to his audience. But Shakespeare the psychologist and artist makes Lear's raving psychological, a faithful presentation of monomania and hysteria.

The stage direction (not necessarily written by Shakespeare) reads: "Enter Lear fantastically dressed with wild flowers," and sometimes the actor represents Lear wearing a chaplet of wild flowers but the lines themselves quite clearly inform us that Lear wore a felt hat (perhaps an old felt

hat with wild flowers intertwined in the ribbon). Seasoned Shakespearean actors have remarked that no stage directions are necessary in Shakespeare, that the lines themselves tell the actor what to do—in this instance what to wear.

The crazed Lear, talking with Gloucester and Edgar says: "I will preach to thee: mark."

The theme of his sermon is the vanity of life, its misery which begins with birth and ends not until death. With the old instinct of reverence he removes his hat, as he had been accustomed to remove it in listening to sermons in the royal chapel. And then he begins his discourse:

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.

But his unstabilized mind cannot hold the thread of his thought. He hesitates, falters, stops, and his wandering eyes fall upon the felt hat which he is holding in his hand; "this is a good block," he murmurs (hatters still speak of the "block" of a hat). He fumbles the hat, so soft, so silent. It suggests his monomania, revenge upon his false daughters and their husbands. Suppose cavalry horses were shod with felt; their steps would not be heard and an enemy's stronghold could be surprised:

If were a delicate stratagem, to shoe
A troop of horse with felt.

The thought fascinates him. He will put the idea and the resolution into practice:

I'll put 't in proof;
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law

—but the excitement of the idea is too much for the old crazed king and he falls into hysterical cries, shrieking the word "kill" six times:

Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

The subtlety of the perturbed mental processes probably did not "get over" to the audience. The audience heard what they craved, the ravings of a madman. But Shakespeare could produce this sensational effect and at the same time satisfy himself as artist and psychologist by giving to Lear's ravings the coherent incoherence of a victim of monomania and hysteria.

Only a few instances in this chapter of the way Shakespeare the artist shaded the exhibitions of Shakespeare the showman. None of his contemporaries did these things with so much cunning, perhaps no other subsequent dramatist until Ibsen.

Shakespeare commentary will never go straight if it overlooks the necessity under which the practised showman worked under the stage conditions of his day. Neither will it go straight if it overlooks the artistic nuances. The middle ground is the only solid ground, recognition of the blending, sometimes conflicting, motives of showman and artist in the dramatic work of William Shakespeare.

He was a romanticist with strong traits of realism, a showman with compelling impulses of an artist. His work is thus a medley, sometimes a hodgepodge, but a hodgepodge behind which flamed the divine fires of genius, the artist's craving to do things the way they should be done.

STOCKTON AXSON.



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